

Early Christian Ireland

T.M. CHARLES-EDWARDS



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EARLY CHRISTIAN IRELAND

This is the first fully documented history of Ireland and the Irish between the fourth and ninth centuries AD, from Saint Patrick to the Vikings – the earliest period for which historical records are available.

It opens with the Irish raids and settlements in Britain, and the conversion of Ireland to Christianity. It ends as Viking attacks on Ireland accelerated in the second quarter of the ninth century. The book takes account of the Irish both at home and abroad, including the Irish in northern Britain, in England and on the continent. Two principal thematic strands are the connection between the early Irish Church and its neighbours, and the rise of the Uí Néill and the kingship of Tara.

The author, Thomas Charles-Edwards, is Professor of Celtic in the University of Oxford. His previous books include *Bechbretha* (1983, with Fergus Kelly), *The Welsh Laws* (1989) and *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship* (1993).

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Abbreviations

AASS	<i>Acta Sanctorum</i> (Bollandists)
AB	<i>Analecta Bollandiana</i>
AClon	Annals of Clonmacnois, ed. D. Murphy, <i>The Annals of Clonmacnois</i> (Dublin, 1896)
Adomnán, VSC	Adomnán, <i>Vita Sancti Columbae</i> , ed. A. O. Anderson and M. O. Anderson, rev. edn by M. O. Anderson, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford, 1991)
AI	Annals of Inisfallen, ed. and tr. S. Mac Airt, <i>The Annals of Inisfallen (MS. Rawlinson B. 503)</i> (Dublin, 1951)
AT	Annals of Tigernach, ed. and tr. W. Stokes, <i>Revue Celtique</i> , 16 (1895), 374–419; 17 (1896), 6–33, 119–263, 337–420; 18 (1897), 9–59, 150–97, 267–303; reprinted in two vols. (Felinfach, 1993)
AU	Annals of Ulster (with the ‘corrected’ AD dates as in the edn of S. Mac Airt and G. Mac Niocaill, <i>The Annals of Ulster (to AD 1131), Part I. Text and Translation</i> , Dublin, 1983)
BAR	British Archaeological Reports (Oxford)
Bede, HE	Bede, <i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i>
BN I, II etc.	<i>Bretha Nemed</i> texts numbered, ed. and tr. L. Breatnach, <i>Uraicecht na Riar</i> (Dublin, 1987)
CCCM	Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Medievalis (Turnhout, 1971–)
CCSG	Corpus Christianorum, Series Graeca (Turnhout)
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina (Turnhout, 1954–)
CGH i	<i>Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae</i> , i, ed. M. A. O’Brien (Dublin, 1962)
CGSH	<i>Corpus Genealogiarum Sanctorum Hiberniae</i> , ed. P. Ó Riain (Dublin, 1985)

- CIH* *Corpus Iuris Hibernici*, ed. D. A. Binchy (Dublin, 1979)
CIIC R. A. S. Macalister, *Corpus Inscriptionum Insularum Celticarum*, 2 vols. (Dublin, 1945–9; vol. 1 repr. Blackrock, Co. Dublin, 1996)
CMCS *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* (nos. 1–25), continued as *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* (nos. 26–)
CS *Chronicum Scotorum*, ed. and tr. W. M. Hennessy, *Chronicum Scotorum: A Chronicle of Irish Affairs from the Earliest Times to AD 1135* (London, 1866)
CSEL *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (Vienna, 1892–)
DIL *Contributions to a Dictionary of the Irish Language*, ed. E. G. Quin *et al.* (Dublin, 1973–76)
EIWK T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship* (Oxford, 1993)
ECMW V. Nash-Williams, *The Early Christian Monuments of Wales* (Cardiff, 1950)
Fél *The Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee: Féilire Óengusso Céili Dé*, ed. and tr. W. Stokes, Henry Bradshaw Society, 29 (London, 1905; repr. Dublin, 1979)
Heist, *Vitae* *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae e Codice olim Salmanticensi nunc Bruxellensi*, ed. W. W. Heist, *Subsidia Hagiographica*, 25 (Brussels, 1965)
Hib. *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*, ed. F. W. H. Wasserschleben, *Die irische Kanonensammlung*, 2nd edn (Leipzig, 1885)
Hogan, *Onom.* E. Hogan, *Onomasticon Goedelicum Locorum et Tribuum Hiberniae et Scotiae* (Dublin, 1910)
JRSAI *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*
Kenney, *The Sources* J. F. Kenney, *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland: Ecclesiastical*, *Records of Civilization* (New York, 1929)
LL *The Book of Leinster, Formerly Leabar na Núachongbála*, ed. O. Bergin, R. I. Best, M. A. O'Brien and A. O'Sullivan, 6 vols. (Dublin, 1954–83)
Löwe (ed.), *Die Iren und Europa* H. Löwe (ed.), *Die Iren und Europa*, 2 vols., *Veröffentlichungen des Europa Zentrums* Tübingen (Stuttgart, 1982)
MGH *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*
AA *Auctores Antiquissimi*

SRG	Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum
SRM	Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum.
Muirchú, <i>Vita S. Patricii</i>	Muirchú, <i>Vita S. Patricii</i> , ed. and tr. L. Bieler with F. Kelly, <i>The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh</i> , Scriptores Latini Hiberniae, 10 (Dublin, 1979)
Ní Chatháin and Richter (eds.), <i>Irland und Europa</i>	P. Ní Chatháin and M. Richter (eds.), <i>Irland und Europa: Die Kirche im Frühmittelalter / Ireland and Europe: The Early Church</i> , Veröffentlichungen des Europa Zentrums Tübingen, Kulturwissenschaftliche Reihe (Stuttgart, 1984)
Ní Chatháin and Richter (eds.), <i>Irland und die Christenheit</i>	P. Ní Chatháin and M. Richter (eds.), <i>Irland und die Christenheit: Bibelstudien und Mission</i> (Stuttgart, 1987)
PG	J.-P. Migne (ed.), <i>Patrologia Graeca</i> , 161 vols. (Paris, 1857–86)
PL	J.-P. Migne (ed.), <i>Patrologia Latina</i> , 221 vols. (Paris, 1844–64)
PLRE	A. H. M. Jones, J. Morris and J. Martindale, <i>The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire</i> , 3 vols. (Cambridge, 1971–92)
Plummer, <i>Vitae</i>	<i>Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae</i> , ed. C. Plummer, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1910)
PRIA	<i>Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy</i>
RC	<i>Revue Celtique</i>
SC	Sources Chrésiennes (Paris)
Tírechán, <i>Collectanea</i>	Tírechán, <i>Collectanea</i> , in <i>The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh</i> , ed. and tr. L. Bieler with F. Kelly, Scriptores Latini Hiberniae, 10 (Dublin, 1979)
UJA	<i>Ulster Journal of Archaeology</i>
VT ²	<i>Vita Tripartita Sancti Patricii</i> , ed. K. Mulchrone, <i>Bethu Phátraic: The Tripartite Life of Patrick</i> (Dublin, 1939)
ŽCP	<i>Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie</i>

A note on pronunciation

There is no room here for a full discussion of the pronunciation of early Irish names, but some important points can be covered. (For further guidance, see P. Russell, *An Introduction to the Celtic Languages*, London, 1995, pp. 223–7.)

Normally, Irish words were stressed on the first syllable. Towards the end of the period covered by this book this initial stress caused vowels in other syllables to be reduced to the ‘murmur vowel’ (as in the second syllable of English *father*). This did not, however, affect long vowels, normally denoted in Old Irish by an acute accent (a long *a* is thus *á*). The main difficulty, however, is with the consonants. Most consonants have two values, mainly depending on whether they are initial or not. So, for example, *deorad* ‘foreigner, alien’ has two *ds*, one initial, the other final. The initial *d* is pronounced as *d*, but the final one as *ð* (*th* as in ‘the’). Similarly, an initial *m* is pronounced as an *m*, but a non-initial one (unless doubled) is a *v*. A different duality is found with *c* and *t*: when non-initial they were pronounced *g* and *d*. These principles of early Irish spelling can be illustrated by a name which recurs frequently in this book, Adomnán, and by two words, *tét*, ‘(harp-)string’, and *éc*, ‘death’. These were pronounced approximately:

aðovnān, with the stress marked on the initial *a*. (For the pronunciation of the *a* see the end of this note.)

Later the *o* in the second syllable was reduced to a murmur vowel, represented by an upside-down *e*. Hence:

aðǽvnān

The other two were:

tēd, ēg (*ēd* was pronounced approximately as in northern English ‘made’)

It may be noted, first, that the short *a* in the first syllable of Adomnán or Cathal was normally pronounced further back in the mouth than a

standard English *a* (to get an approximately correct pronunciation shorten the long *a* in ‘father’) and, secondly, an *s* before an *e* or an *i* may well have been pronounced as a *sh*: hence Caisel = Cashel.

Another difficulty with consonants is that, as in Russian, they may be either ‘palatal’ or ‘neutral’ (‘slender’ or ‘broad’). This complication will largely be ignored here for simplicity’s sake; where it is shown, this will be by a superscript ⁱ, which indicates that the adjacent consonant is pronounced in the way it would naturally sound before an *i* or *y*. Thus English ‘key’ has a palatal *k*, while ‘cap’ does not. The use of the accent over a diphthong, such as *ái* (approximately English ‘aye’), is to distinguish it from *a* followed by the ‘glide vowel’ signifying that the adjacent consonant is palatal.

In the following suggested pronunciations of some common early Irish names *x* stands for the *ch* in *loch*; *γ* stands for its voiced counterpart, as in German *Tage*; *θ* stands for the *th* in ‘thin’, to be distinguished from *ð* standing for the *th* in ‘the’; all the names are pronounced with the stress on the first syllable:

Áed	aið (approximately to rhyme with ‘hythe’)
Áedán or Aídán	aiðān (but anglicised as Aidan), where <i>ān</i> rhymes with Khan
Báetán	baidān
Brega	breyā
Cathal	caθəl (later <i>th</i> came to be pronounced <i>h</i> , and this pronunciation is common)
Colmán	colmān
Congal	conγəl
Domnall	dovnəll
Donnchad	donnəxəð
Éogan	ēoγən (but later, in Middle Irish, Éogan changed to Eógan, and later still the <i>E</i> was dropped and the <i>γ</i> came to be pronounced <i>w</i> ; hence this name is commonly pronounced <i>owən</i> , to rhyme with ‘low ‘un’)
Flaithbertach	flaθvərtəx
Lóegaire	loiγəre
Míde	miðe (anglicised as Meath = mīð)
Muirchertach	murxərtəx
Muirchú	mu‘rəchū
Murchad	murəxəð

Óengus	oinɣəs
Suibne	su ⁱ vne (the later pronunciation is anglicised as Sweeney)

Tadgg	taðg (often pronounced ‘taig’)
-------	--------------------------------

In the names of kindreds (including royal dynasties), it is customary to use a relatively modern pronunciation for *Uí* ‘descendants’:

Uí Néill	ī nē ⁱ ll (the <i>ll</i> is ‘slender’ or ‘palatal’)
----------	--

Uí causes the following letter to have its ‘internal’ value:

Uí Dúnlainge	ī ðūnləŋe
--------------	-----------

Uí elides a following *F* and changes *S* to *h* (this is shown by a superscript dot):

Uí Fáeláin	ī āilā ⁱ n.
------------	------------------------

A note on the Chronicle of Ireland

The 'Chronicle of Ireland' is a handy term for the parent-text lying behind the extant annals up to AD 911, in very much the same way as one Alfredian text of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle lies behind extant copies. It is believed that up to *c.* 740 this single source was written on Iona; from then until 911 it was continued at a monastery in the Irish midlands, probably in Brega. From 911 the text represented by the main hand of the Annals of Ulster was continued at Armagh until the break in the text in the twelfth century, but other annals derive from a continuation written at Clonmacnois. Hence, for the period before 911, if the Annals of Ulster agree with any of the Clonmacnois group of annals, one can be reasonably certain that the entry in question derives from the Chronicle of Ireland. However, it is very likely for other reasons that many other entries, now preserved only in one branch of the tradition, also go back to the Chronicle of Ireland.

Introduction

This history of the Irish between the fourth and the ninth centuries, from the beginning of the historical period up to the Vikings, follows only one of many possible approaches to the period. It is, in the first place, a history of the Irish people, and not just of the inhabitants of Ireland. What the Irish did in Britain, Francia and Italy is as much its concern as what they did at home. Secondly, although it gives a major place to the Church, it is a history of a people rather than of books or artefacts. Some surviving texts cannot be given a clear historical context; they are anonymous, only vaguely dated and not attached to any particular institution. Some of them may be of great intellectual importance, but I have deliberately preferred to concentrate on those for which I could propose an historical context.¹ For that reason, the main illustration of Irish artistic production occurs within a chapter on Columba and Iona, while the main discussion of intellectual debate is in the chapter on the paschal question.

Another principle limiting the range of topics covered was that there should be themes connecting one chapter with another. The effect has been to divide the book into three parts, beginning with an introductory section in which the Ireland of *c.* 700 is presented, first in a discursive manner, through the journey made by Bishop Tírechán's Patrick, and, secondly, more analytically, in the two chapters on Irish society. The first chapter has been written for those who like maps and are not afraid of strange names; those who do not fall into this category may wish to pass fairly rapidly on towards chapter 2. The hope, however, is that from the first chapter the reader will acquire a sense of the mental as well as of the political and ecclesiastical geography of the northern half of Ireland, while chapters 2 and 3 will show how Irish society worked. These

¹ I have taken this course with an easier conscience because of the clear and authoritative guidance given by D. Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland, 400–1200* (London, 1995), chaps. 7 and 8.

chapters present a relatively static picture based on exceptionally rich sources from a comparatively short period, approximately 650–750. The written sources for the century and a half from 650 to 800 have become more numerous with the important demonstration that a group of saints' lives in a fourteenth-century manuscript (the 'O'Donoghue Lives') belongs to the eighth century.² One of the functions of chapter 4, on Ireland and Rome, is to address issues of long-term change and so redress to some extent the bias towards static description in the previous chapters.

The second and central part of the book is devoted to the early Irish Church. Chapter 4 on Ireland and Rome was also conceived as necessary background to the history of the conversion of Ireland to Christianity in chapter 5, while the theme of conversion leads to the question of how the Irish Church was organised once it had been consolidated, a topic discussed in chapter 6. The theme of conversion remains prominent in chapter 7, on Columba, Iona and Lindisfarne, but it extends into a broader topic, the contribution of the Irish to the formation of Latin Christendom, the forerunner of the Western Europe of today. Insular art as it developed after the conversion of the Picts and the Northumbrian English from Iona illustrates how an international cultural province could be created by a shared religion. The career of Columbanus (chapter 8) in Frankish Burgundy and Lombard Italy helped to redirect an old monastic tradition and to make both monasticism and missionary work central concerns of Frankish rulers for the first time; without those developments the Carolingian reforms would have taken a quite different form. Columbanus' career also gave a quite new urgency to an old dispute about the date of Easter. This was to offer opponents of the Irish, whether in Francia or in England, a weapon with which to undermine their influence; and it divided the Irish Church at home into 'Roman' and 'Hibernian' camps. The Easter debate, however, also offers an opportunity (in chapter 9) to appreciate how complicated and intellectually difficult such an issue could become, and how serious the obstacles were to any satisfactory resolution. Chapter 10, on Armagh, Kildare and Canterbury, sees how these controversies generated rival conceptions of authority in the Irish Church.

On the secular side I have concentrated on the related issues of the Uí Néill and the kingship of Tara (chapters 11 and 12). This is partly because the evidence is relatively good, partly because these topics offer

² R. Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives: An Introduction to Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* (Oxford, 1991), esp. chap. 10.

major themes that can be pursued through almost the whole period covered by the book. This decision has meant that some provinces of the island have received scanty attention. A difficulty here is that the uneven but considerable wealth of the evidence is liable to be overwhelming: the annals and the genealogies in combination enable something to be said about thousands of named individuals. Early Irish history is thus liable to become a morass of names; what is worse, often little can be said about the persons who bear the names other than what were their pedigrees and when, and sometimes how, they died. One purpose behind restricting secular history to a limited range of themes was to reduce the horrors of early Irish names for those who are unfamiliar with them. A further difficulty is that the distribution of evidence is so patchy. Most of it comes from the period after 650; that is why the first three chapters exploit the material dating from about AD 700 to give a picture of Ireland at that period. To understand patterns of change, therefore, it seemed wise to choose themes that could be studied over a long period. The last two chapters make some slight amends for the concentration on the Uí Néill by bringing evidence about the Éoganachta of Munster to bear on the general issue of the powers of kings. It is argued that there was a political alliance between the Uí Néill, the Connachta and the Éoganachta, created by hard fighting but kept in being also by a persuasive picture of the past history of Ireland, by origin-legends and genealogies. The conclusion looks at how this political order began to decay in the late eighth and early ninth centuries.

In spite of this thematic approach, however, many named persons will appear in this book. It may be some comfort to the reader, as it has been for the author, to know that the potentially off-putting effect of recording numerous names was already a problem in the seventh century. The *Life of St Columba* by Adomnán, abbot of Iona, written about 700, begins with a display of anxiety about names.³ The *Life* – like this history – was intended for non-Irish as well as Irish readers, and Adomnán had no illusions about the likely reaction of the foreigners to Irish names of persons, places and peoples. *Vilis*, ‘worthless’, was likely to be their opinion of the language, and ‘obscure’ their judgement on the names. One solution to the problem might have been to avoid using Irish names whenever possible.⁴ Adomnán, however, did not take this path; instead

³ Adomnán, *VSC*, 1st Preface, pp. 2–3; and tr. R. Sharpe, *Adomnán of Iona: Life of St Columba*, Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth, 1995), p. 103.

⁴ This seems to have been the policy of the author of the *Vita Prima* of Brigit.

he showed unusual care and discrimination in their use. It is for this reason that he provides so good a point of departure for those who, separated from him not just by language but by some thirteen hundred years, find Irish names even more of an obstacle than did Adomnán's non-Irish contemporaries. His approach is all the more rewarding because names, once their subtleties have been appreciated, can give us an impression of what constituted personal identity in early medieval Ireland.⁵ In chapter 1, as we are conducted around much of late seventh-century Ireland by Bishop Tírechán, we shall meet many names, of individuals, dynasties and peoples. It is hoped that once the reader has, so to speak, been deposited in a very unfamiliar country, he may learn his way around with the aid of Tírechán, Tírechán's later imitators and some maps.

We may begin with a story Adomnán tells in the second chapter of Book 1. The subject is Finten son of Telchán (better known by his pet-name Munnu) the founder of Tech Munnu, the modern Taghmon in Co. Wexford. His standard name, Finten mac Telcháin, consists of a first name, Finten, followed by a patronymic, *mac Telcháin* 'son of Telchán'. A high proportion of early Irish names are of this form, similar to such Old English names as Ælfred Æthelwulfing, 'Alfred son of Æthelwulf'.

Finten had decided to visit Columba when news came of the saint's death. Nonetheless, he kept to his plan to sail over to Iona, where Baíthéne was now abbot. Finten's name was not known to Baíthéne or to the other monks and he was thus 'received with the hospitality appropriate to any unknown guest'. When he came before Baíthéne he was asked for his *gens*,⁶ his province, his name, his condition of life, and the reason for his voyage. What Baíthéne was doing here is what the vernacular texts sometimes describe as 'requesting *scéla* [news, tales] from someone'. It seems to have been standard practice for the superior to ask for *scéla* from his inferior, or for the host to ask them from the guest. So, in the story of the death of Conaire the Great, *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, Eochaid, king of Ireland, requests *scéla* from the woman he has seen by the well of Brí Léith (Co. Longford). Because she is assumed to be inferior, she has to identify herself first.

The significance of such requests for identification is illustrated by the ninth-century account of the customs of Tallaght, the leading house in the reforming group known as the *Céli Dé*, 'clients of God'. It is there

⁵ B. Ó Cuíy, 'Aspects of Irish Personal Names', *Celtica*, 18 (1986), 151–84; M. A. O'Brien, 'Notes on Irish Proper Names', *Celtica*, 9 (1971), 212; M. A. O'Brien (ed. R. Baumgarten), 'Old Irish Personal Names', *Celtica*, 10 (1973), 211–36.

⁶ For the *gens* see chap. 2 (ii) (b).

said that ‘As for those who came to converse with him [probably Máel Rúain, a principal leader of the reform], it is not his usage to ask them for news [*fachmarc scél dóib*], but to see that they profit in those matters only for which they come.’⁷ In terms of Baithéne’s questions, the custom at Tallaght seems to have been to ask only for the reason for someone’s journey, not for name, *gens*, province, or even a person’s condition of life. Interaction with outsiders was to be kept to the austere essentials; a person’s worldly situation was irrelevant.

Names carry information. In Ireland, as in modern Europe, first names were usually either male or female. They might also imply other things, for example the kind of life a person was leading. Old Irish is rich in pet-names. One type of pet-name, such as Mo Lua or Do Bécóc, is apparently restricted to monks. Their affectionate quality is well demonstrated by a story told of Díarmait of Killeshin, *alias* Mo Dímmóc: ‘His foster-mother said, while caressing him, “This is my [*mo*] Dímmóc.”’⁸ These distinctively monastic names contain both British and Irish linguistic features; similarly, they are attested in both Irish and Welsh texts and were used for both Irishmen and Britons. Although they evidently follow a convention established no later than the sixth century – when interaction between Britons and Irishmen remained frequent – the names, even in Wales, have at least one Irish feature.⁹ They were a common language of monastic charity developed in the Irish mission field.

There were also other variations in names that were similarly expressive. Baithéne himself, the second abbot of Iona, is said to have had the name Conin; it may be that Baithéne, which means ‘Foolish One’, was a pet-name given by Columba, his monastic foster-father and cousin.¹⁰ The extraordinary profusion of persons called Columbanus or Colmán – based on the Latin word for a dove, *columba* – bore names which were implicitly Christian. Columba himself was perhaps not given that name at birth, but rather when he was destined for the monastic life.¹¹

⁷ *The Monastery of Tallaght*, ed. E. J. Gwynn and W. J. Purton, *PRIA* 29, C (1911), p. 127, § 2.

⁸ *Fél.* 8 July, Notes. On this type of name, see P. Russell, ‘Patterns of Hypocorism in Early Irish Hagiography’ (forthcoming). ⁹ Lenition rather than nasalisation after *mo*.

¹⁰ Adomnán, *VSC*, Appendix, says that Baithéne was also called Conin.

¹¹ See *Adamnan's Vita S. Columbae*, ed. W. Reeves (Dublin, 1857), p. 6 n.^k, where Reeves suggests that Columba may have been his baptismal name alongside a secular name, Crimthann (for which see the sixteenth-century *Life* by Manus O'Donnell, *Betha Colaim Chille: Life of Columcille*, ed. A. O’Kelleher and G. Schoepperle, Urbana, 1918; repr. Dublin, 1994, c. 53); the associations of *columba* would also be appropriate if the name was given when he was confirmed (in Irish called ‘going under the hand of a bishop’, *CIH* 2129. 22).

The questions put by Baithéne, apart from the reason for Finten's journey, give us some idea of what constituted personal identity in Ireland c. AD 700. The first name was distinct from the 'additional name', *forainm* or *cognomentum*, and from the paternal descent (usually a patronymic, 'son of X', but sometimes 'grandson of X').¹² A man used by Columba as a messenger is given the name Lugaid and the 'additional name' Laitir (*láitir* 'strong');¹³ a guest is called 'Aidán by name, son of Fergnoe', thus distinguishing the name on the one hand from the patronymic on the other.¹⁴ Paternal descent was a matter of wide significance in seventh-century Ireland: it was the starting-point of a full genealogy and thus, for a king, the basis of his right to rule; for the ordinary man, it established his right to inherit land. On this basis kindreds acquired names: the Uí Néill were 'the Descendants of Níall'; similar names were Cenél Loairn, 'the Kindred of Loarn' (hence Lorne in Argyll) or Cland Cholmáin, 'the Children of Colmán', the principal royal dynasty of Mide (Meath).

Some names, such as Áed, were very common and this made it more usual to use 'additional names'. A leading king of the Southern Uí Néill had the name Áed Sláne, with a *forainm* which associated him with a major site within his kingdom, the modern Slane on the River Boyne. Brothers might bear the same first name, rendering an additional name, a *forainm*, essential: Áedán mac Gabráin, the most powerful of the early kings of Dál Riata in Argyll and Co. Antrim, had sons called Echoid Find and Echoid Buide ('the Fair' and 'the Yellow-Haired'), both alive at the same time.¹⁵ The primary name, therefore, was the first name; *forainm* and paternal descent were adjuncts, sometimes treated as part of the name, sometimes not.

There are very few demonstrably foreign names. One of the few is Artúr, borrowed from the Britons; it was borne by a son of Áedán mac Gabráin and by a member of a Leinster dynasty, the Uí Máil.¹⁶ The first of these examples may point to friendly relations between the Irish settlers in Argyll and their British neighbours of Strathclyde; similar links may explain the Leinster examples.¹⁷ Other exceptions tend to cluster at

¹² Cf. *ainm ndúiles* = *nomen proprium*, the first name, as in *Fél.*² clxix.1. Patronymics yielded later surnames of the MacMurrough type; identifications as 'grandson of so-and-so' yielded names beginning in Ó (O'), such as Ó Ceallaigh, O'Kelly.

¹³ 'Lugaidum nomine, cuius cognomentum scotice Lathir dicitur', *VSC*, ii.5; 'Lugaidum nomine cognomento Laitirus', *ibid.* ii.38. ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, i.26. ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, i.9.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, i.9; *CGH* i.78; Irish had a rich set of native names based on *art* 'bear': Art, Artgal, Artri etc.

¹⁷ A. S. Mac Shamhráin, *Church and Polity in Pre-Norman Ireland: The Case of Glendalough* (Maynooth,

the beginning and at the end of the period. The early inscriptions in the ogam alphabet, probably of the fifth century, reveal a higher proportion of Latin names in Ireland than one would expect on the basis of later sources.¹⁸ The names are not distinctively Christian and probably indicate the prestige of Rome and the links established by the Irish settlements in western Britain. In the eighth and ninth centuries, however, there was a new wave of Latin names, only these were Christian, such as Elair from Hilarius (the saint of Poitiers). These names were borne by churchmen, and predominantly by reformist monks such as the *Céli Dé*. They may be placed alongside other names that cannot have been given at birth, such as Dublittir, an anchorite and scholar who was one of the main early leaders of the *Céli Dé*; his name means 'Black Letter'. When one remembers that the *Céli Dé* leader Máel Rúain avoided the practice of 'asking for news', that is for self-identification, one can see that the *Céli Dé* were concerned to make the transition between world and monastery into a sharply defined boundary. Even the personal identity carried by a name could be left behind, because the life of the monk was a new beginning; it was not (as they thought it was for all too many of their unreformed brethren) a continuation of secular life by other means. Put another way, the problem was that personal identity included much background, such as descent, native kingdom and *gens*, that belonged to a secular world not to the monastery. This was especially true of paternal descent, and one can see from annalistic obits that among churchmen some were more likely to be given patronymics than others.¹⁹ For some, the descent which attached them to a secular kindred was to be set aside, just as the monk should not be buried in the paternal cemetery, but in one belonging to his church.²⁰

1996), p. 82.

¹⁸ *CIIC* nos. 16, 188 (both MARIANI; cf. Welsh Meirion < Marianus), 20, 56, 166, 265, discussed by C. Swift, *Ogam Stones and the Earliest Christians*, Maynooth Monographs, Series Minor 2 (Maynooth, 1997), pp. 90–6. ¹⁹ See below, chap. 6. ²⁰ *Hib.* xviii.3.

CHAPTER ONE

Ireland in the seventh century: a tour

In the 640s, Agilbert, a Frank who was to end his days as bishop of Paris, lived for some years as a student in Ireland.¹ His visit is striking because in 640 the Franks were still the most powerful people in Western Europe, while Ireland was considered to lie at the end of the world. Yet he was only the first of several foreign visitors to Ireland to be mentioned by the Northumbrian English historian Bede.²

Agilbert's journey to Ireland was a consequence of an earlier journey in the reverse direction, from Ireland to Francia: a pilgrimage by a Leinsterman, Columbanus. This pilgrimage, or *peregrinatio*, was not a pilgrimage in the sense of a visit to some shrine, such as to the Holy Places in Palestine, or to the tomb of St Peter in Rome or to St James of Compostela; it was not a journey to a holy place where prayers were said and the pilgrim then returned home.³ Such pilgrimages were common in the early Middle Ages, but Columbanus' was not one of them. His was a journey with no return, a journey not to a shrine, but away from family and native land. The result was the foundation of three monasteries in northern Burgundy: Annegray, Luxeuil and Fontaine.⁴ From these bases Columbanus gained the position of the pre-eminent holy man of the Merovingian kings and their aristocracy in the early seventh century – an uncomfortable and controversial holy man, it is true, but

¹ Bede, *HE* iii.7.

² Other named persons who spent some time in Ireland include Æthelhun (Edilhun), Æthelwine (Ediluin) (*HE* iii.27), Chad (iv.3), probably Cedd (seems to know Irish, iii.25), Ecgerht (iii.27 etc.), Hygbald (iv.3), Tuda (iii.26), Wihthberht (v.9), Willibrord (v.10) and the two Hewalds (*ibid.*).

³ K. Hughes, 'The Changing Theory and Practice of Irish Pilgrimage', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 11 (1960), 143–51, repr. in her *Church and Society in Ireland AD 400–1200*, ed. D. N. Dumville, Variorum Reprints (London, 1987), no. xiv; A. Angenendt, 'Die irische Peregrinatio und ihre Auswirkung auf dem Kontinent vor dem Jahre 800', in Löwe (ed.), *Die Iren und Europa*, 52–79; T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'The Social Background to Irish *Peregrinatio*', *Celtica*, 11 (1976), 43–59.

⁴ Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, i.6 and 10, ed. B. Krusch, *Ionae Vitae Sanctorum Columbani, Vedastis, Iohannis*, MGH SRG (Hanover, 1905), pp. 163, 169–70.

indisputably holy.⁵ Frankish bishops might be alarmed at the times at which he celebrated the movable feasts of the Church, but some of them sought him as their 'soul-friend' nonetheless.⁶

Agilbert was buried in the crypt at Jouarre, near Paris, a monastery which had been founded by one of the most influential families to give their support to Columbanus.⁷ This Frankish nobleman's journey to Ireland is thus clear evidence that the links between Ireland and Francia created by Columbanus' *peregrinatio* had not been broken. Another *peregrinatio*, within a few years of Agilbert's voyage to Ireland, brought Aidan to Northumbria from Iona, a small island off the western tip of another, larger, island, Mull in the Inner Hebrides.⁸ The repercussions of Aidan's mission were to bring Englishmen to Ireland in considerable numbers, both for study and for the monastic life. Bede distinguishes those going for the sake of study, who visited the houses of Irish teachers, from those whose purpose was training in the monastic life;⁹ both received what, in modern terms, would be called their maintenance free; the students also had their teaching free.¹⁰ Aldhelm, abbot of Malmesbury and later bishop of Sherborne, wrote c. 675 of boatloads of Englishmen going to Ireland to study.¹¹ For much of the seventh century, therefore, Ireland was not just a pimple upon the outer skin of the known world, as the Irishman Cummian described his native island in 632 or 633;¹² it was the resort of students anxious for advancement in the Christian Latin learning common to Western Europe, and also of young monks eager to gain knowledge of the monastic training which had produced Columbanus and Aidan.

It so happens, by a fortunate accident, that we can have some notion of the Ireland visited by Aldhelm's boatloads of Englishmen. About 690 Bishop Tirechán wrote a book whose purpose was to defend the

⁵ I. N. Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms, 450-751* (London, 1994), pp. 184-9; J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 63-73.

⁶ Columbanus, *Epistolae* i. 6 (ed. and tr. G. S. M. Walker, *Sancti Columbani Opera*, Scriptores Latini Hiberniae ii, Dublin, 1957, pp. 8-9).

⁷ Marquise de Maillé, *Les Cryptes de Jouarre* (Paris, 1971); J. Hubert, J. Porscher and W. F. Volbach, *Europe in the Dark Ages* (London, 1969), pp. 64-78. ⁸ Bede, *HE* iii.5. ⁹ *Ibid.*, iii.27.

¹⁰ This was not true for the natives: *CIH* 592.12-13 (*Berrad Airechta*, § 14: German tr. by R. Thurneysen, *Die Bürgschaft im irischen Recht*, Abhandlungen der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-hist. Klasse, Berlin, 1928, no. 2, p. 8; Engl. tr. by R. C. Stacey in T. Charles-Edwards *et al.*, *Lawyers and Laymen*, Cardiff, 1986, p. 212).

¹¹ Aldhelm, *Epistolae* v (ed. Ehwald, *Aldhelmi Opera Omnia*, MGH AA xv, Berlin, 1919, p. 492; tr. M. Lapidge and M. Herren, *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, Ipswich, 1979, p. 163).

¹² Cummian, *De Controversia Paschali*, ed. M. Walsh and D. Ó Cróinín, *Cummian's Letter De Controversia Paschali and the De Ratione Computandi* (Toronto, 1988), p. 72 (line 110).

territorial authority of the community of Patrick, headed by his heirs, the bishops of Armagh, and to cement their alliance with the leading dynasty in the Irish midlands.¹³ The framework of the book is a circular journey supposed to have been made by St Patrick himself around the northern half of Ireland, beginning on the east coast a few miles north of Dublin, travelling west across the great midland plain, over the River Shannon into Connaught, north into Donegal, round the northern coast to Co. Antrim, and then southwards again back to the midlands.¹⁴ Such a circuit was an expression of lordship, ecclesiastical as much as secular. The Patrick portrayed by Tírechán is undoubtedly very different from the fifth-century original, but the story as he told it is very instructive about the mental as well as the political map of seventh-century Ireland. Patrick's journey implied that the political power of kings was subject to a higher power, that of the holy man and his heirs. Tírechán's Patrick is thus a political activist: each ancestor of a dynasty powerful in the late seventh century received a blessing that was claimed to be the foundation of that dynasty's greatness; each ancestor of a dynasty once powerful but by then declining was subject to the holy man's anger, and a curse which led inexorably to the collapse of its fortunes. Tírechán's primary concern was with the allegiance due from churches to the heir of Patrick, the bishop of Armagh, but this concern was inseparable from the attitude of kings. Too many of them were 'deserters and arch-robbers', who 'hate the jurisdiction of Patrick, because they have taken away that which was his, and they fear that, if the heir of Patrick were to investigate his rights of jurisdiction, he could vindicate for himself almost the whole island as his domain'.¹⁵ Tírechán's book was just such an investigation into the rights of the heir of Patrick; it was his duty to search for the *paruchia Patricii*, by which he meant the rights of ecclesiastical lordship over churches claimed by the bishop of Armagh. His account of Patrick's circuit around the northern half of Ireland embodied the results of his investigation. As a conse-

¹³ Tírechán, *Collectanea*, pp. 124–63; for the date, see the Appendix to chap. 10. Note that the texts ed. Bieler, pp. 122–4 [II 1–4] and 164–6 [III 2–8] do not appear to have been part of Tírechán's original text; for strong arguments in favour of seeing Tírechán as a promoter of the interests of two principal churches associated with Patrick, Donaghpatrick in Co. Meath and Domnach Mór in Co. Mayo, and also of *Sil nÁeda Sláne*, see C. Swift, 'Tírechán's Motives in Compiling the *Collectanea*: An Alternative Interpretation', *Ériu*, 45 (1994), 53–82.

¹⁴ As a very brief appendage (*finito circulo*, 'after the circuit had been completed'), there is also an account of a journey *via* Leinster to Cashel in Munster, *Collectanea*, 51. The significance of this story is appreciated and countered by the eighth-century *Life of Ailbe*, c. 29 (ed. Heist, *Vitae*, p. 125).

¹⁵ Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 18.

quence, Tírechán, a native of north-west Connaught, also offers us an exceptionally detailed understanding of the ecclesiastical and political geography of the northern half of Ireland at the end of the seventh century.¹⁶

It is also particularly fortunate that others were to supplement the work of Tírechán. His text is contained in the Book of Armagh, a small manuscript written by three scribes for the heir of Patrick, Torbach, in 807.¹⁷ The book contains the New Testament, Sulpicius Severus' Life of St Martin, an abbreviated version of Patrick's own works and a corpus of later material about St Patrick or Armagh. This consists of a Life by Muirchú, the *Collectanea* by Tírechán, the Book of the Angel, various documents known as the *Additamenta*, 'things added', and the so-called *Notulae* or 'brief notes'. These *Notulae* are written in a cursive script on two pages of the manuscript.¹⁸ They are highly abbreviated: a word is often represented only by its first letter. As a consequence they would be unintelligible to us were it not that they often correspond closely with a later version of Patrick's journeys around Ireland, that contained in the Tripartite Life of St Patrick.¹⁹

In its present form, the Tripartite Life is the result of successive minor revisions and translations, in more than one stage; but the *Notulae* and the later Latin lives of Patrick make it virtually certain that there was an earlier version no later than c. 800.²⁰ The common original text lying behind two of the later Lives of St Patrick has been dated to the eighth century, and a possible author identified: Colmán 'of the Britons', who

¹⁶ The value of Tírechán's evidence for Connaught has been well shown in an unpublished Oxford D.Phil. thesis by Catherine Swift, 'The Social and Ecclesiastical Background to Tírechán's Seventh-Century *Collectanea*' (1993[1994]). For the context and value of the *Collectanea*, see also C. Doherty, 'The Cult of St Patrick and the Politics of Armagh in the Seventh Century', in J.-M. Picard (ed.), *Ireland and Northern France AD 600–850* (Dublin, 1991), pp. 55–65.

¹⁷ R. Sharpe, 'Palaeographical Considerations in the Study of the Patrician Documents in the Book of Armagh', *Scriptorium*, 36 (1982), 3–28; *Liber Ardmachanus: the Book of Armagh*, ed. J. Gwynn (Dublin, 1913).

¹⁸ See the facsimile edn by E. J. Gwynn, *Book of Armagh: the Patrician Documents*, Irish Manuscripts Commission, Facsimiles in ColloTYPE of Irish manuscripts, iii (Dublin, 1937); the *Notulae* are ed. L. Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, pp. 180–2. Their function has been disputed: see K. Mulchrone, 'What are the Armagh *Notulae*?', *Ériu*, 16 (1952), 140–4; Bieler, 'The *Notulae* in the Book of Armagh', *Scriptorium*, 8 (1954), 89–97; K. Mulchrone, 'Ferdomnach and the Armagh *Notulae*', *Ériu*, 18 (1958), 160–3.

¹⁹ *Bethu Phátraic: The Tripartite Life of Patrick*, ed. K. Mulchrone (Dublin, 1939: [VT²]); vol. 1 was the only one ever published. Some material from two detached leaves was edited by K. Mulchrone, *Galway Archaeological and Historical Society Journal*, 20 (1942), 39–53. There is a translation in the earlier edition by W. Stokes, *The Tripartite Life of Patrick*, 2 vols., Rolls Series (London, 1887).

²⁰ The conclusions of Bieler, 'The *Notulae* in the Book of Armagh', are to be preferred to those of Mulchrone, 'What are the Armagh *Notulae*?' and 'Ferdomnach and the Armagh *Notulae*'.

died in 751.²¹ This lost Life was probably a generation earlier than the text to which the *Notulae* refer. The latter was certainly not identical with the Tripartite Life. This is not just because the earlier text was probably largely in Latin while the Tripartite Life is mainly in Irish: the latter's claims to churches in Leinster, for example, are more moderate than are those of the *Notulae*. Where, however, the *Notulae* corroborate the Tripartite Life, we have a version of Patrick's journeys no later than c. 800 to set alongside Tírechán's text, roughly a hundred years earlier. The function of the *Notulae* was, then, to provide an index to a late eighth-century Latin Life of Patrick, which is no longer extant but is closely reflected in the Tripartite Life.

The earliest recension of the Tripartite Life itself has been dated to the early ninth century.²² The combination of these Patrician texts – Tírechán c. 690, the *Notulae* c. 800, and the Tripartite Life of the ninth century – is one of the main foundations of early Irish history. They offer successive pictures of the ecclesiastical and political geography of Ireland, which are substantially, though far from completely, updated in each version.²³ A simplified diagram showing the development of the written material about St Patrick is as follows (fig. 1.1).

Up to 800 most texts are likely to have been in Latin, although some of the *Additamenta* are in Irish. The tenth-century text of the Tripartite Life still has some Latin passages and each successive version may have shifted more into Irish, since the language is not homogeneous in date.²⁴

Tírechán's Patrick entered many kingdoms but only explicitly recognised one contemporary as king: Lóegaire mac Néill, king of Tara. Yet modern historians maintain that, in Tírechán's day, there were more than a hundred small kingdoms in Ireland.²⁵ For a small kingdom of this type, they have employed the Old Irish word *tíath* 'people'. Large units such as provinces – Leinster and Munster would be examples – were

²¹ F. J. Byrne and P. Francis, 'Two Lives of Saint Patrick: *Vita Secunda* and *Vita Quarta*', *JRSAL*, 124 (1994), 14–15; note the dating of the *Vita Secunda* to the early ninth century (p. 9), of the *Vita Tertia* to the last quarter of the eighth (p. 8) and of the *Vita Quarta* to the ninth century (p. 10).

²² Byrne and Francis, 'Two Lives of Saint Patrick', p. 7, following Bieler, 'Bethu Phátraic: Versuch einer Grundlegung des Verhältnisses der irischen Patriciusviten zu den lateinischen', *Anzeiger der phil.-hist. Klasse der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, 111 Jahrgang 1974, So. 10 (1974), 266–71 (repr. as no. xiv in L. Bieler, *Studies on the Life and Legend of St Patrick*, ed. R. Sharpe, London, 1986).

²³ For example, Tírechán ignores Cenél nÉogain, but that dynasty is given a central place in the *Notulae*, no. 9, and in the Tripartite Life, *VT*² 1755–1805.

²⁴ This is the conclusion of K. H. Jackson, 'The Date of the Tripartite Life of St Patrick', *ζCP*, 41 (1986), 5–45.

²⁵ F. J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings* (London, 1973), p. 7: 'probably no less than 150 kings in the country at any given date between the fifth and twelfth centuries'.

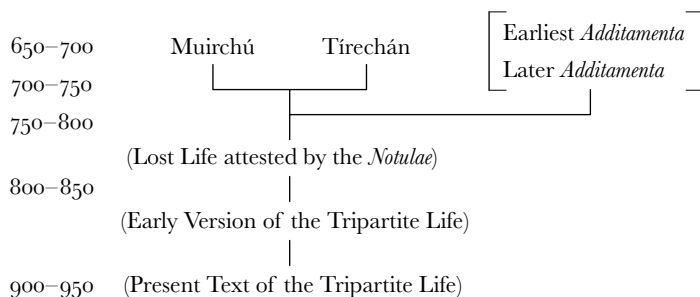


Fig. 1.1. Development of the Patrician texts

composed of numerous *túatha*. For the laws, some of which were contemporaneous with Tírechán, a standard *túath* had a king, a church, a poet and an ecclesiastical scholar.²⁶ Yet, while Tírechán mentions many dynasties, he refrains from conferring the title of king on any of them except for the king of Tara. There is an apparent contradiction between his political geography, in which the landscape is divided into numerous small districts, to some of which he assigns dynasties, and his political theory, according to which Ireland is dominated by a single monarchy.

A full exploration of this paradox will occupy several chapters of this book. At the outset, however, it can be said without qualification that most of the small territories mentioned by Tírechán were kingdoms, for the obits of their kings are recorded in the annals. Small kingdoms often had a clear topographical rationale: their territories tended to coincide with *maige*, Latin *campi*, areas of well-cultivated land. A *mag* or *campus* was contrasted with mountain, bog or woodland. In other European countries, such a district would usually be a subordinate unit of government rather than a kingdom. In Ireland, these small kingdoms were indeed politically subordinate, but the subordination was of one king to another rather than of a local officer, such as a sheriff or count, to the king.

The resilience of small-scale kingship in Ireland is not solely explained by the topography of the country. It was also a consequence of the means used to maintain the cohesion of the great dynasties – those that supplied overkings who were the lords of several client-kings,

²⁶ *CIH* 1123.32; 2225.7. That the *túath* should, if possible, have a bishop is suggested by *CIH* 234.4–5; *Riagail Phátraic* speaks of a ‘chief bishop of a *túath*’ and claims that a *túath* without a bishop loses ‘the entitlement of its faith’, *CIH* 2129.6–10 = ‘The Rule of Patrick’, ed. and tr. J. G. O’Keeffe, *Ériu*, 1 (1904), 218 (text), 221 (translation). Minor peoples, however, may well not have had a bishop.

rulers of small kingdoms. Royal dynasties were segmentary, in that they had a single stem but several branches. The unity of such dynasties was often fragile: while they needed to preserve some cohesion in the face of rivals, the kingship, or overkingship, was the object of contention between the branches. To mitigate the divisive effects of competition for supremacy, it was standard practice to attempt to advance the interests of several branches, not just the one in current possession of the overkingship.²⁷ One way to achieve this end was to allow that the head of a subordinate branch of a dynasty might be a king, even if only a client-king. The pressure was thus to multiply minor kingships in order to maintain internal dynastic support for the major kings.

As lesser branches of great dynasties held on to royal status as long as they could, so also did lesser dynasties. Even if the struggle to remain royal proved impossible, there were other ways of retaining high rank that were also calculated to maintain the separate identity of the *túath*. Several churches were controlled by formerly royal kindreds. A great church and a great saint could offer a powerful focus of unity, capable of helping to sustain a widely scattered people. The people called the Fothairt had one small kingdom in the far south-eastern corner of Leinster (including the modern port of Rosslare), another in the centre, in the east of Co. Carlow, but also lesser branches, apparently sub-royal, in the far north-west of the province and close to Kildare; yet others constituted kindreds attached to further Leinster churches such as Cell Auxilli (Killashee close to Naas).²⁸ All considered their great saint, Brigit, to be their patron.

The unity between different *túath*-kingdoms is sometimes presented as if it were solely a matter of a personal tie of clientship between a client-king and his overlord. As the example of the Fothairt shows, however, things were more complicated. There were dispersed peoples as well as segmented dynasties linking different kingdoms; there were also treaties of alliance, some of which appear to have endured over long periods. Moreover special occasions encouraged wider travel, such as the 'fairs', general assemblies that were partly for serious business (political, ecclesiastical and judicial), partly for entertainment, such as horse-races, or

²⁷ An example is Cenél nÉogain: T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'Early Medieval Kingships in the British Isles', in S. Bassett (ed.), *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms* (London, 1989), pp. 34–6.

²⁸ *CGH* i.80–6; Cell Auxilli is at 126 a 2; Domnach Mór, *ibid.*, may be the Domnach Mór Maige Luadat just to the east of Maynooth; another branch, Uí Báetáin, were settled close to Maistiú, the seat of kingship of the Uí Dúnlainge in the seventh century (*ibid.*, i.84, 126 a 41); the Uí Chúlduib were 'of Kildare', *ibid.*, i.86. Some were even outside Leinster, such as 'the Fothairt Imchláir at Armagh' (*ibid.*, i.82).

the great feastdays of the major saints.²⁹ A principal perquisite of the overking was to have a 'circuit' by which he enjoyed the hospitality of his clients, and the overking was accompanied by a household; a poet also had a circuit by which he might praise several patrons. The churchman, too, like the poet and other 'people of art', had the ability to travel from one kingdom to another, retaining his social standing in each. Provinces, such as Leinster and Munster, were not, therefore, just fragile pyramids of royal clientship, kept in being only by personal agreements between kings. They were long-enduring entities fortified by a great accumulation of common loyalties, common traditions and common conceptions of the shape of their world. The stories told by Tírechán and the Tripartite Life sought to shape these loyalties, traditions and conceptions in a Patrician mould.

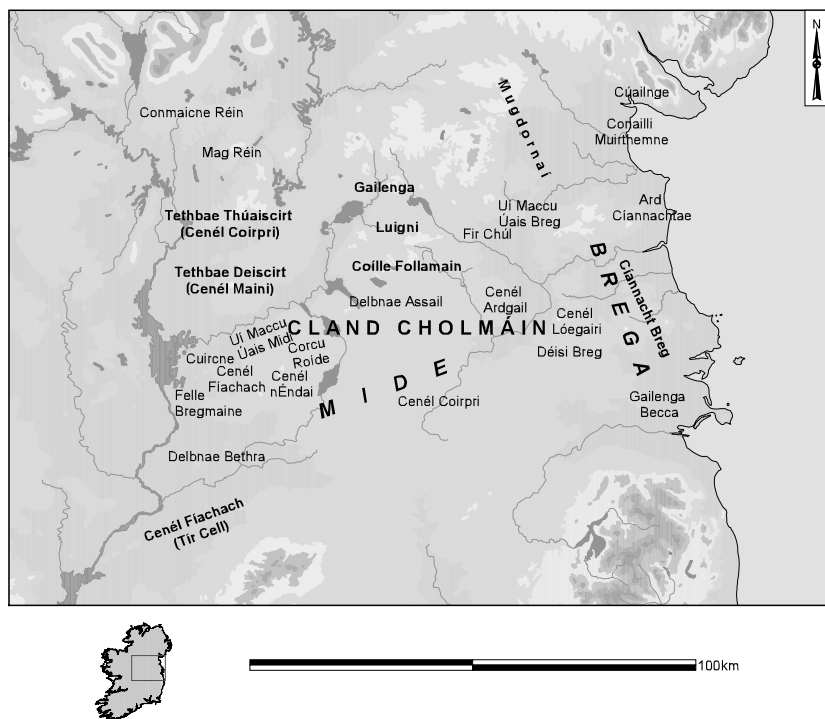
(I) THE LANDS OF THE SOUTHERN UÍ NÉILL

Book I of Tírechán's *Collectanea* is devoted to 'the lands of the descendants of Níall' stretching from the eastern coast north of Dublin to the River Shannon, thus including the northern part of Co. Dublin, the north-west of Co. Offaly and the whole of the modern counties of Meath, Westmeath and Longford. Although he gave more space to his native province of Connaught, the lands of the Uí Néill were the centre of his Ireland and the seat of what he regarded as the chief royal power in the island. It contained the provinces of Brega in the east, Mide (the 'Middle Country') in the centre and Tethbae between the Shannon and the Inny. Brega runs from the River Liffey at Dublin, north over the River Boyne ending in the low hills south of Louth. It includes some of the driest and richest agricultural land in Ireland. Along the lower Boyne were the great neolithic passage-graves of Dowth, Knowth and Newgrange at the centre of one of the most densely settled districts of prehistoric and early medieval Ireland. The old passage-tombs were no concern of Tírechán's, but one of them was to become the 'seat of kingship' of one branch of the Uí Néill in the eighth century.³⁰ Its neighbour, Newgrange, was one of the principal mythological sites of Ireland.³¹

²⁹ Cogitosus, *Vita Brigidae*, tr. S. Connolly and J. M. Picard, *JRSAL*, 117 (1987), Pref. and c. 32.

³⁰ Knowth (N 996 735); *VT*² calls such sites *rigsuid* 'royal seat' (745) or *suid flatha* 'a ruler's seat' (1736-7). On this site see G. Eogan, 'Excavations at Knowth, Co. Meath, 1962-1965', *PRLA*, 66 c, no. 4 (1968), 299-400, which includes, pp. 383-400, F. J. Byrne, 'Historical Note on Cnogba (Knowth)'.

³¹ *The Metrical Dindsenchas*, ed. E. J. Gwynn, ii, Todd Lecture Ser., ix (Dublin, 1906), pp. 10-25; *Tochmarc Étaíne*, ed. O. Bergin and R. I. Best, *Ériu*, 12 (1934-8), pp. 137-93, §§ 1, 7-9 etc.



Map 1. The kingdoms of the southern Uí Néill

Near the mouth of the Boyne was the port, Inber Colpthai, which served much of Brega.³² Muirchú's *Life of Patrick* brings the saint south on a coastal voyage from Co. Down to land at the *portus* at Inber Colpthai.³³ The foundation story of the church of Trim, further up the Boyne, was written early in the eighth century;³⁴ it brings Lommán in his ship from Patrick's landing-place in the estuary of the Boyne as far as Trim: the port at the mouth of the Boyne is conceived as being the nodal point of river traffic. The Boyne and the Liffey are like two short-handled scythes: the handle takes one inland westwards from the coast, but soon the blade swings southwards. The Boyne is thus the great river of the plain of Brega, while the Liffey drained *Mag Lifi*, the plain of

³² Cf. Colp (grid ref.: o 12 34); recent excavations have revealed part of what may be a large cemetery. ³³ Muirchú, *Vita S. Patricii*, i.14 (ed. Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, p. 84).

³⁴ F. J. Byrne, 'A Note on Trim and Sletty', *Peritia*, 3 (1984), 316–18. The text is *Additamenta*, cc. 1–4 (ed. and tr. Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, pp. 166–71).

Liffey, the most prosperous district of Leinster and, from Tírechán's time, the seat of the most bitter enemies of the Uí Néill, the Uí Dúnlainge.³⁵ Within the scythe blade of the Boyne lies another prehistoric site treated in our period as a seat of kingship, Tara.³⁶ Muirchú, in his *Life of Patrick*, portrayed Tara as the Babylon of pagan Ireland and Lóegaire – son of the Níall who gave his name to the Uí Néill – as its Nebuchadnezzar. In Tara, Lóegaire was said to have had his palace, which was the centre of the plain of Brega, 'an exceptionally great plain, where was the greatest kingdom among these peoples [of the Irish] and the head of all paganism and idolatry'.³⁷

In the seventh century, Tara retained a significance as an ancient seat of kingship, but kings did not normally reside there. There was a simple reason why an ancient site, not normally inhabited by kings, should have been the pre-eminent royal seat of the Uí Néill and even of Ireland. The local Brega branch of the Uí Néill may have been, in Tírechán's day, the most powerful Uí Néill dynasty; but it did not have a monopoly on power either over the Uí Néill kingdoms or over those other kingdoms, not of the Uí Néill, which acknowledged Uí Néill supremacy. Sometimes, therefore, the supreme king among the Uí Néill was not from Brega. Since Tara was recognised as the highest seat of kingship, an Uí Néill king from outside Brega might have a royal seat within 'the exceptionally large plain of Brega', yet, at the same time, the local Uí Néill ruler could retain his seat of kingship. In Tírechán's time, this more local seat of kingship for Brega was further north, at Ráith Airthir (Oristown), in the valley of the Boyne's principal tributary, the Blackwater, and close to the site of the royal assemblies of the king of Tara at Tailtiu (Teltown).³⁸

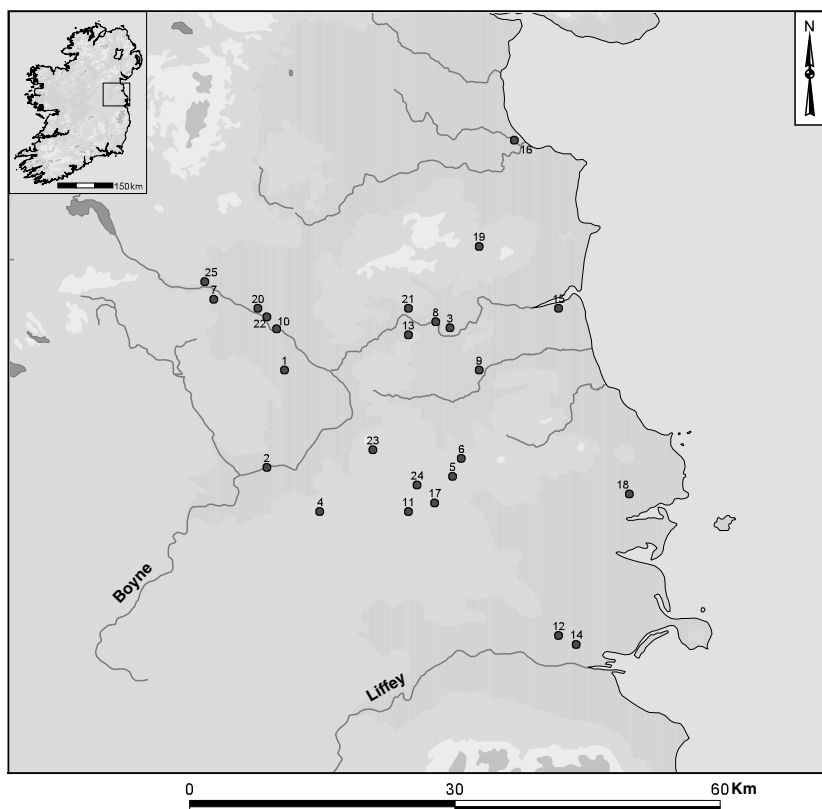
Near to Ráith Airthir and Tailtiu lay one of the earliest churches to be named after Patrick, Domnach Pátraic, and Tírechán made full use of the contiguity of the three sites, royal and ecclesiastical. A central element in the Patrician legend by the late seventh century was a confrontation between Patrick and Lóegaire, the king of Tara, surrounded by his druids.³⁹ The confrontation supposedly took place on the night of Easter, with Patrick beginning the ceremonies of the Easter vigil on the Hill of Slane by the Boyne; he thus challenged the pagan festival being

³⁵ Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 12. *Lífe* (Liffey) was originally the name of the district, Ruirthech ('Stampeding') being the old name of the River Liffey.

³⁶ See below, chap. 11. The grid ref. is N 91 59. ³⁷ Muirchú, *Vita S. Patricii*, i.13.

³⁸ Oristown is N 79 75; Teltown N 80 74; Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 9–10; the point of 10 is better brought out by VT² 743–66.

³⁹ Muirchú, *Vita S. Patricii*, i.13–21; Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 8; CIH 527–8.



- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1 Ard Breccáin / Ardbraccan | 14 Glas Noiden / Glasnevin |
| 2 Áth Truim / Trim | 15 Inber Colpthai |
| 3 Sid in Broga / Newgrange | 16 Lind Dúachail / Annagassan |
| 4 Calatruim / Galtrim | 17 Loch nGabor / Lagore |
| 5 Cell Fhoibrig / Kilbrew | 18 Lusca / Lusk |
| 6 Cell Moinni / Kilmoon | 19 Mainister Buiti / Monasterboice |
| 7 Cenandus / Kells | 20 Ráith Airthir / Oristown |
| 8 Cnogbae / Knowth | 21 Sláne / Slane |
| 9 Dom Liacc / Duleek | 22 Taitiu / Teltown |
| 10 Domnach Pátraic / Donaghpatrick | 23 Temair / Tara |
| 11 Domnach Sechnaill / Dunshaughlin | 24 Treóit / Trevet |
| 12 Findglas / Finglas | 25 Tuilén / Dulane |
| 13 Findubair Abae / Fennor | |

Map 2. Brega

celebrated by Lóegaire and his druids further south at Tara. Tírechán's Patrick, however, was remarkably mobile during this Easter. He began it on the Hill of Slane, went south to Tara during the night, and then north again on Easter Sunday to Tailtiu and Domnach Pátraic. This one liturgical ceremony was to be the means by which a pagan king's power was brought to nothing and his druids publicly defeated; it was also to be the means by which a Christian seat of kingship was to be sanctified. Tara was the arena for the defeat of paganism, Tailtiu and Ráith Airthir for Patrick's validation of a Christian dynasty.

There is a further twist, however, to Tírechán's story. Lóegaire was an appropriate pagan king of Tara to set against the Christian missionary Patrick, because his descendants were, by the seventh century, no more than the ruling dynasty of a small kingdom around Trim.⁴⁰ Tailtiu, on the other hand, lay within the principal kingdom of the Uí Néill. Tírechán describes Tailtiu as a place 'where there is accustomed to be a royal assembly'. This assembly was apparently an annual event: in 873, 876 and 878, the Annals of Ulster note with surprise that it was not held in those years. Although Tailtiu's fame was as the site of the annual fair and assembly (Tírechán's *agon*), it also had a church, and could be used as the site of a synod.⁴¹ Patrick, as presented in Tírechán's version of his legend, is thus skilful in a policy of divide and rule: he takes two royal sites bound up with the kingship of the Uí Néill and likewise two branches of the dynasty; Patrick defeats one and exalts the other.

The stories Tírechán tells about the responses of the sons of Níall to Patrick's preaching correspond far too well with the political standing of their descendants in Tírechán's own lifetime for there to be any serious chance that they were a truthful account of events in the fifth century.⁴² Cenél Lóegairi, 'the kindred of Lóegaire', was, therefore, one lineage whose merely local power was remorselessly publicised by Patrician hagiographers. Because Lóegaire was both the common ancestor of the lineage and the person who gave it his name, his actions were naturally considered to be the direct cause of the fortunes of his descendants.

⁴⁰ Trim was not linked to Armagh until early in the eighth century, and by then the legend was firmly established: Byrne, 'A Note on Trim and Sletty', 316–18.

⁴¹ AU 723.5; Adomnán, *VSC* iii. 3; *Vita Prima S. Brigitae*, ed. J. Colgan, *Triadis Thaumaturgae* . . . *Acta* (Louvain, 1647), p. 531, tr. S. Connolly, *JRSAL*, 119 (1989), c. 39; *Bethu Brigitte*, ed. D. Ó hAodha (Dublin, 1978), c. 40 (p. 14, tr. p. 31).

⁴² D. A. Binchy, 'Patrick and his Biographers: Ancient and Modern', *Studia Hibernica*, 2 (1962), 58–68.

Another Uí Néill lineage to be given the same harsh treatment was Cenél Coirpri, 'the kindred of Coirpre'. In Tírechán's time, the kindred of Coirpre was the most powerful of the Uí Néill dynasties to have been excluded from the kingship of Tara. Separate territories ruled by Cenél Coirpri are attested on the borders of Kildare and Meath, in the northern part of Co. Longford around Granard, and in Co. Sligo.⁴³ Professor Byrne has observed that the geographical range of these territories and the hostile interest shown by hagiographers strongly suggest that Cenél Coirpri had held a predominant position among the Uí Néill in the earliest phases of their expansion.⁴⁴ Tírechán, however, was not afraid to have Patrick call Coirpre *inimicus Dei*, 'the enemy of God'. The supposed reason for this opprobrious epithet was Patrick's excursion northwards on Easter Sunday.

When Patrick came to Tailtiu on Easter Sunday in the fifth year of the reign of Lóegaire son of Níall,⁴⁵ he met Lóegaire's brother Coirpre.⁴⁶ Coirpre had intended to kill Patrick and had some of the saint's servants flogged in the Blackwater to compel them to identify Patrick. His reward was the standard dynastic prophecy for a rejected king: 'Thy seed shall serve the seed of thy brothers and there will be no king of thy seed for ever.' This prophecy may seem a little odd if one reflects that there were to be three territories ruled by Cenél Coirpri. The point, however, is defined by the place: at the end of the seventh century Tailtiu was the royal assembly of all the Uí Néill, and the kingship in question was therefore the kingship of Tara, 'the greatest kingdom among these peoples'.⁴⁷ The point is driven home by Tírechán by means of a contrast he makes between Coirpre and another son of Níall, Conall:

⁴³ Cell Chúaca, Kilcock, N 88 39, was within Coirpre Uí Chiárdai according to *Fél.*², Notes, 8 January; cf. Carbury, Co. Kildare, N 69 34, but the epithet 'Uí Chiárdai', may be an error since it is applied to northern Tethbae, *Fél.*² Notes, 31 Jan. (unless the one dynasty ruled both territories); cf. AU 954.5. Coirpre Mór is Coirpre Dromma Cliab (Drumcliff, Co. Sligo), *Fél.*² Notes, 12 June. The annals give frequent obits of kings of Cenél Coirpri in the seventh and eighth centuries, but not in the ninth: in the Annals of Ulster the only obit after 813 and before the end of the Chronicle of Ireland, nearly a century later in 911, is for a king of Cenél Coirpri Móir in 873. It is possible that up to the middle of the eighth century the dispersed lands of Cenél Coirpri were ruled as a single kingdom; kings of Cenél Coirpri were active in Co. Sligo, AU 707.2, 762.5, and in Northern Tethbae: see 742.11 (reading 'Iugulatio Aeda rig Ceniuil Choirpri' with AT) and 752.14. The first clear evidence of separate kingdoms is in AU (AT) 752.9, the obit of Conaing *nepos* Duib Dúin, described as king of Coirpre Tethbae (for Conaing's ancestor, Dub Dúin, see AU 671.3). Even after 752, those described simply as kings of Cenél Coirpri (784.2; 813.5) may have been overkings of all three territories. The tendency of Cenél Coirpri to fragment dynastically, just as it had fragmented territorially, may have been a consequence of the decline of Cenél Conaill, Cenél Coirpri's powerful ally, from 734.

⁴⁴ Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, pp. 90–1.

⁴⁵ Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 1.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴⁷ Muirchú, *Vita S. Patricii*, i.13.

But then he came to Conall son of Níall, to his house which he built in the place where today stands the Great Church of Patrick, and he [Conall] received him with great joy, and he [Patrick] baptised him and confirmed his throne for ever, and he said to him: 'The seed of your brothers will serve your seed for ever. And you ought to show mercy to my heirs after me for ever, both your sons and the sons of your sons [by paying] a perpetual due to my faithful sons.'

He [Conall] measured out with his own feet a church of sixty feet for Patrick's God, and Patrick said: 'If this church is ever encroached upon, you will not have a long and stable reign.'

'The Great Church of Patrick' was, then, a former royal site, granted to Patrick by the king himself, who confirmed his grant in the regular manner by measuring the limits of the church. The feet of the king defined the church of Patrick's God. Ráith Airthir nearby, the principal seat of the kings of Brega in Tírechán's day, was for the hagiographer the secondary site, chosen because the earlier one had been vacated to make room for Patrick's God. And because Patrick's God had been thus honoured, Patrick put his full authority behind the claims of Conall's descendants to the kingship of Tara, the old pagan site some fifteen miles to the south.⁴⁸

Tírechán's Patrick was not, in fact, always a good political prophet; and for that very reason the *Collectanea* are an excellent political source. He shows which royal authority men considered to be the strongest in the late seventh century, although their expectations were to be disappointed. Tírechán makes no division between the lines of descent from Conall son of Níall. He writes as if they were a single coherent lineage. Yet already, by 600, a feud was developing between two branches. It would first define the separate and opposed loyalties of kinsmen, so that they became two distinct lineages: Sílnáeda Sláne, 'the Seed of Áed Sláne', and Cland Cholmáin, 'the Children of Colmán'. Áed Sláne's descendants would have much the better of things in the seventh century, and it was their predominance in which Tírechán had absolute confidence, for it was they who were the kings of Brega and it was their royal seat which was at Ráith Airthir. Early in the eighth century, however, they began a bitter feud among themselves and so gave Cland

⁴⁸ A similar concern with the relationship between Coirpre mac Néill and his brother Conall is shown by the *Vita Prima S. Brigitae*, ed. Colgan, c. 65, tr. Connolly, c. 64; but it is much more even-handed and is combined, in c. 64 (ed. Colgan) / c. 62 (tr. Connolly), with an expression of repugnance for the principal rulers of the southern Uí Néill, descendants of Conall: 'it will be offspring that sheds blood and will be an accursed stock and will hold sway for many years' (Connolly's suggestion that a 'not' may have been omitted is wrong: the Uí Néill were indeed to hold sway for many years).

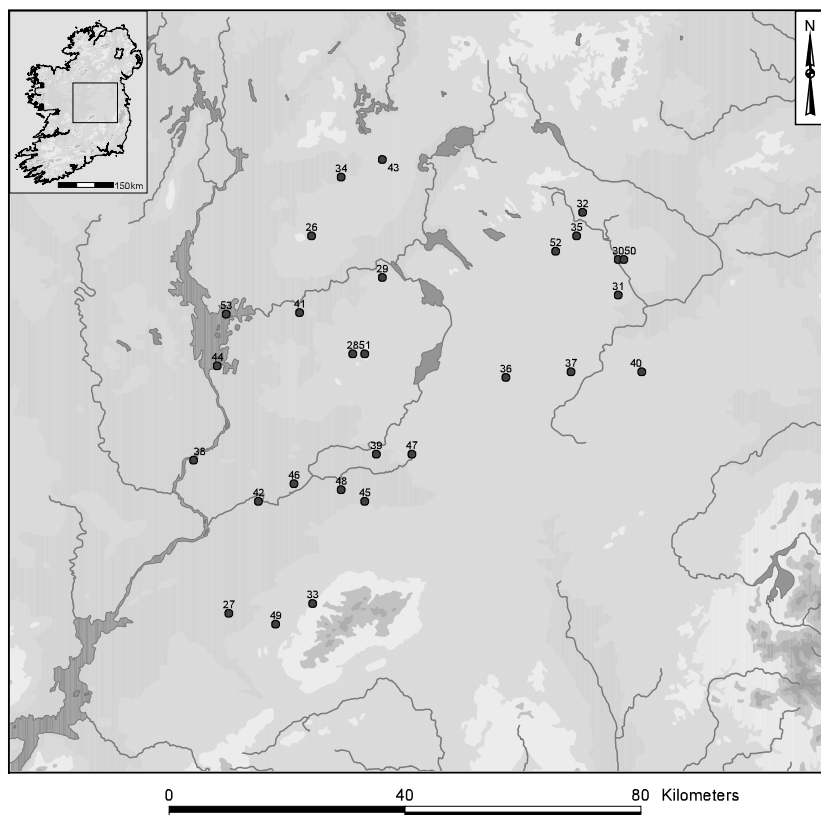
Cholmáin its chance. No one writing fifty years after Tírechán could have had his serene faith in the kings of Brega.

When Tírechán's Patrick went west into Meath, away from the Boyne valley, he left behind him for a while the high politics and the confrontations with kings which had marked his time in Brega. Instead of 'the exceptionally great plain of Brega', he now went from one small plain to another: Mag nEchredd, Mag Taidcni, Mag nEchnach, Mag Singite, Mag mBile, Mag Teloch. The political geography of most of Ireland was defined by such small plains (not all are now identifiable). It should therefore be explained that the words translated 'plain', Irish *mag* and its Latin counterpart *campus*, were used for areas of agricultural land as opposed to mountain, forest and bog. The *mag* may be an island of dense settlement in the midst of thinly settled and less cultivated land (in the midlands, normally bog). Often the *mag* was the natural elementary unit of Irish politics and formed the territory of a distinct people, *túath*. This was almost certainly true of two, at least, of these plains in Meath: Mag mBili is probably the territory of the people known as Fir Bili, 'Men of a Sacred Tree', and Mag Teloch of those known as Fir Thelach, 'Men of Hillocks'.⁴⁹ In both these cases the identity of a people derives from the territory. Occasionally, a *túath* occupied more than one *mag*: among the Uí Fhailgi of north-west Leinster there was a *Túath Dá Maige*, 'People of Two Plains'; on the Sligo border of Co. Leitrim there was a people known as Callraige Tremage, 'the Callrige of Three Plains'.

Patrick's journey across Meath resembled the letter *s*. At first, Tírechán takes him west, perhaps along the Slige Assail, 'Assal Road', so called because it went west from Tara to Delbnae Assail (around the modern town of Delvin in Westmeath)⁵⁰ and Mag nAssail (a district including part of Mullingar and much of the land near Lough Ennell). Patrick went no further west on that line than Mag Singite (an area probably including

⁴⁹ Fir Bili gave its name to the later barony of Farbill, Fir Thelach to that of Fartullagh: Fr P. Walsh, *The Placenames of Westmeath* (Dublin, 1957), pp. 161–5, 371. The barony of Farbill (< Fir Bile) is coextensive with the parish of Killucan. Mag mBili (the territory of the Fir Bili) included the early monastery of Clúain Fota Báetáin Aba (N 53 44), *Féil.²*, Notes, 11 Feb. (p. 72), which was the church of Óengus mac Tipraiti (*ob.* 746, AU), author of a hymn in honour of St Martin of Tours: Kenney, *Sources*, no. 99; M. Lapidge and R. Sharpe, *A Bibliography of Celtic-Latin Literature 400–1200* (Dublin, 1985), no. 589. To judge by the later barony of Fartullagh (< Fir Thelach), Tírechán's Mag Teloch may have stretched from Mullingar in the north to Tyrrellspass in the south. Walsh, *Placenames of Westmeath*, p. 180, identifies the place mentioned by Tírechán, the church in *Capite Carmelli in Campo Teloch*, with the church of Kilbride, N 44 44, on the edge of Dunboden Park.

⁵⁰ Delvin < Delbnae is at N 60 62; cf. Walsh, *Placenames of Westmeath*, pp. 368–9.



- | | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| 26. Ardachad / Ardagh | 40. Dún Cúair / Rathcore |
| 27. Birra / Birr | 41. Forgnaide / Forgney |
| 28. Cell Áir / Killare | 42. Gailinne / Gallen |
| 29. Cell Bicsige / Kilbixy | 43. Gránai-ret / Granard |
| 30. Cell Bile / ? | 44. Inis Aingin / Hare Island |
| 31. Cell Delga / Kildalkey | 45. Lann Elo / Lynally |
| 32. Cell Scíre / Kilskeer(y) | 46. Liath Mancháin / Lemanaghan |
| 33. Cenn Etig / Kinnitty | 47. Ráith Aeda maic Bricc / Rahugh |
| 34. Clúain Brónaig / Clonbroney | 48. Raithen / Rahan |
| 35. Clúain Crema / Clonmellon | 49. Saiger / Seirkieran |
| 36. Clúain Fota Bae-táin Aba / Clonfad | 50. Tlachtga / Hill of Ward |
| 37. Clúain Iraird / Clonard | 51. Uisnech |
| 38. Clúain moccu Nóis / Clonmacnois | 52. Clúain Ernáin / Clonarnay |
| 39. Dairmag / Durrow | 53. Inis Bó Finde / Inchbofin |

Map 3. Mide and Tethbac

Tevrin, halfway between Delvin and Mullingar), but turned south-east to Mag mBili (the district around Killucan), then west again to Mag Teloch on the south-east side of Lough Ennell.⁵¹ This kingdom was closely associated with St Brigit of Kildare: the *Vita Prima* of that saint and her Irish Life, *Bethu Brigte*, have a story implying that it was served by eighteen churches.⁵² Finally he came to Uisnech of Meath, the traditional umbilical centre of 'the Middle Land', Mide, and thus the midmost point of Ireland.⁵³

The most interesting details of this journey from Tara to Uisnech come in the *Notulae* and in the Tripartite Life, and thus belong to the late eighth-century Life. Tírechán gives the full name of only one church, Cell Bile, among Patrick's foundations on this part of the circuit, and even then he immediately goes on to say that it belongs to the community of Cell Scíre.⁵⁴ Cell Bile is the first of several churches said by Tírechán to have been taken from Patrick by other religious communities. The name, Cell Bile, means 'church of sacred trees', just as Mag mBili, further south-west, is 'plain of a sacred tree'. Whereas Boniface wasted no time in cutting down the sacred tree of the Saxons, the missionaries who converted Ireland took no such liberties.⁵⁵ As late as the eleventh century, a particularly offensive tactic in warfare was to cut down the enemies' sacred tree.⁵⁶ No one is recorded in the pre-Viking annals as having committed so outrageous an act. The continuing reverence for sacred trees is indicated by the names Mag mBili and Fir Bili: the kingdom and the people were identified by the tree which probably marked the place of their assembly. Cell Bile, 'church of sacred trees', exemplified, therefore, the stratagem of converting places so as to convert people – converting the sacred sites of a pagan people to Christian use in the process of converting them.

Tírechán admits that Cell Bile belonged to Cell Scíre, a church

⁵¹ Tevrin (or Turin) is at n 54 58, a townland in the parish of Rathconnell and the barony of Moyashel. See VT² 849 (and cf. *Notulae* 19): 'Temair Singite la Firu Assail'; Walsh, *Placenames of Westmeath*, pp. 45 n., 243.

⁵² *Vita Prima*, ed. Colgan, c. 21, tr. Connolly, c. 23; *Bethu Brigte*, ed. Ó hAodha, c. 21.

⁵³ Walsh, *Placenames of Westmeath*, pp. 343–6; n 29 48. Bieler's text needs repunctuating to make geographical sense (as it is, it implies that Uisnech was in *Campus Teloch*). It should read: '... sub manibus Filii Caille. In Huisniuch Midi mansit iuxta Petram Coithrigi...' In the mythological tale *Tochmarc Étaíne*, ed. and tr. Bergin and Best, § 5, Uisnech was the home of Eochaid Ollathair, the Dagda or 'Good God'. ⁵⁴ Cell Scíre > Kilskeer(y) at n 66 71, south-west of Kells.

⁵⁵ Willibald, *Vita S. Bonifatii*, 6, ed. W. Levison, *Vitae Bonifatii*, MGH SRG (Hanover, 1905), p. 31; tr. C. H. Talbot, *Anglo-Saxon Missionaries in Germany* (London, 1954), pp. 45–6. Cf. A. T. Lucas, 'The Sacred Trees of Ireland', *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, 68 (1963), 16–54.

⁵⁶ AI 982.4; 1051.4; 1089.3; 111.6; AT 982.

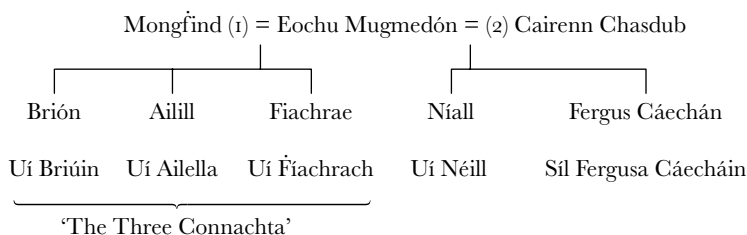


Fig. 1.2. Síil Fergusa Cáecháin

mentioned in the genealogies as the property of an obscure collateral branch of the Uí Néill, excluded from royal power but hanging on to high ecclesiastical status, Síil Fergusa Cáecháin, ‘the Seed of Fergus Cáechán’. This church provides a good introduction to the devices of the early Irish genealogist.⁵⁷

Eochu Mugmedón was the common ancestor of the Uí Néill and the three leading dynasties of the Connachta (> Connacht, Connaught); the latter were known, therefore, as ‘the Three Connachta’. The division between the Connachta and the Uí Néill is marked by the different mothers: half-brothers were natural rivals for the kingship and this relationship thus provided an entirely intelligible explanation of the separate identities of their descendants.

Níall’s full brother, Fergus, has a *forainm*, ‘extra name’, Cáechán, ‘the little one-eyed person’. *Cáech*, ‘having sight in only one eye’, ‘squinting’, appears in a legal tract as a physical blemish capable of excluding someone from the kingship.⁵⁸ The use of derisive nicknames in competing for succession to the kingship is exemplified in a story told by the Tripartite Life about the ruling dynasty of Tírechán’s native kingdom, the Uí Amolngada of North Mayo:⁵⁹

Patrick then went across the River Moy into the land of the Uí Amolngada. The twelve sons of Amolngid (son of Fiachrae son of Eochu) came to meet him, Óengus, Fergus, Fedelmí, Stooping Éndae, Éndae ‘Bare-Back’, Corbmac, Coirpre, Echu Díainim, Echu ‘One-Ear’, Éogan Coir, Dubchonall, Ailill ‘Pot-Face’. The sons of Amolngid were disputing about the kingship. There were twenty-four kindreds (that is, old kindreds)⁶⁰ in the land. They refused to

⁵⁷ *CGH* i.132, 133 (138 a 42, 139 b 47).

⁵⁸ *Bechbretha*, ed. T. M. Charles-Edwards and F. Kelly (Dublin, 1983), §§ 31–2. (Similarly for the Sassanians, Procopius, *Wars*, i. xi. 4.) ⁵⁹ *VT*² 1449–59.

⁶⁰ It is unclear what this means, but for a suggestion see below, p. 549.

accept as their king a man with a *forainm*. Óengus therefore put *foranmann* on his brothers. This Óengus was the proudest of the sons of Amolngid. They submitted the dispute to the judgement of Lóegaire son of Níall son of Echu, king of Tara, and of his brother, that is Éogan son of Níall.⁶¹

If a *forainm* could be made to stick – and here a friendly poet acting as satirist could work wonders – the person's reputation would be fatally besmeared. Just this, apparently, was deemed to have happened to Fergus Cáechán. Unlike the fortunate Echu Diainim, 'Echu without Blemish', among the sons of Amolngid, but like his brothers, Stooping Éndae, Éndae Bare-Back and Ailill Pot-Face, Fergus the One-Eyed was kept from a royal throne by a satirical epithet, whether true or false. The lasting effects of his exclusion were emphasised by the alternative name for his descendants, Uí Cháecháin, 'the Descendants of the One-Eyed', alongside Sílf Fergusa Cáecháin, 'the Seed of Fergus the One-Eyed'.

By the end of the eighth century Armagh had more definite interests in the churches of Meath than in Tírechán's time and was in clear competition with more powerful rivals than Cell Scíre. The greatest churches of the midlands were Clonmacnois, a great monastery in a minor kingdom, Delbnae Bethra, situated on the east bank of the Shannon about eight miles south of Athlone,⁶² and also Clonard, near the frontier between Leinster and Meath.⁶³ Caill Húallech (probably in Delbnae Assail), the church of Lonán mac Senaig, was acquired by Clonmacnois and then given to Clonard in exchange for two churches, Cell Lothair in Brega and Clúain Alad Deirg further west.⁶⁴ Imlech Sescainn, on the east shore of Lough Ennell, was also acquired by Clonmacnois.⁶⁵ Maigen in Mag nAssail was lost by the neglect of the heirs of Patrick and passed into the possession of the community of Columba.⁶⁶ The kings of Meath in the eighth century avoided committing themselves to any one great church. Although they favoured Durrow, one of Columba's monasteries, and probably gave the land for the foundation of Kells early in the ninth century, they also promoted Clonard and patronised Clonmacnois.⁶⁷

⁶¹ The inclusion of Éogan son of Níall alongside Lóegaire shows that the story in its present form dates from after c. 740, by which time it was clear that Cenél nÉogain had supplanted Cenél Conaill as the leading dynasty among the Northern Uí Néill: see below, pp. 572–4.

⁶² N 00 30. ⁶³ N 65 45.

⁶⁴ VT² 837; *Notulae*, 24; cf. links with Cassán of VT² 819; Patrick was still in Delbnae by l. 842; Clonmacnois and Clonard were linked in the person of the *secundus abbas* in CS 838.

⁶⁵ VT² 846–8; *Notulae*, 19. ⁶⁶ VT² 865–6; *Notulae*, 20.

⁶⁷ M. Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry: The History and Hagiography of the Monastic Familia of Columba* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 64–7, 68–9; AU 764.6 records a battle between two members of Cland Cholmáin after the death of Domnall mac Murchada; one contestant was associated with the community of Durrow, the other with the community of Clonmacnois. For Clonard cf. AU 851.6; 859.3.

The strongest claims of Armagh seem to have been in Delbnae Assail, the district around the modern Delvin. The Tripartite Life tells a pleasant story, the personal names of which are confirmed by the *Notulae*.⁶⁸ Patrick was on one of his three visits to Rome when he met six young clerics 'with their books in their girdles'. Patrick offered them leather from his cloak to make book-satchels. They accepted, and asked Patrick, 'When we part, where shall we go?' To which Patrick replied, 'Wherever you settle, put your book-satchel on the ground, and where the ground swallows it up, there shall you be.' The prophecy, remarks the Life, was fulfilled. 'That was the Bréifnech of Patrick in Clúain Ernáin, which was subsequently adorned with gold and *findruine*.'⁶⁹ The Tripartite Life lists the clerics and their churches:⁷⁰

The following, however, were the six: the priest Lugach in Cell Airthir, the priest Columb in Clúain Ernáin, and Meldán of Clúain Crema, and Lugaid mac Eirc in Fordruim, and the priest Cassán in the great church of Mag nEchnach; five holy men they were, of Patrick's community in Delbnae Assail, and five meals are due to Patrick from them. The sixth was the elder Cíarán of Saiger.

The story illustrates the claims of great upon dependent churches. What it says literally is that 'Patrick has five tables with them', in other words, when the heir of Patrick visits, he is entitled to a night's hospitality, he and his company, from each of the five churches.⁷¹

This was probably a relatively light and honourable due, consistent with the claim made by Tírechán and the Book of the Angel (c. 686), that Armagh allowed its subject churches to retain free status.⁷² An even lighter due is claimed in the Tripartite Life from Nendrum in Strangford Lough:

When Patrick was on the road he saw a gentle young warrior herding pigs. His name was Mo Chae. Patrick preached to him, baptised him, tonsured him, and gave him a Gospel Book and the things necessary for the Mass. And on another

⁶⁸ VT² 805–21; *Notulae*, 21–4.

⁶⁹ On *findruine* see J. P. Mallory, 'Silver in the Ulster Cycle of Tales', in D. Ellis Evans, J. G. Griffiths and E. M. Jope (eds.), *Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Celtic Studies*, Oxford, 1983 (Oxford, 1986), pp. 35–8.

⁷⁰ VT² 816–21; Clúain Crema was Clonmellon (Clúain Meldáin); Clúain Ernáin is identified by Walsh, *Placenames of Westmeath*, pp. 368–9, with Clonarney (a parish and townland in the barony of Delvin, N 613 653); cf. L. Swan, 'The Early Christian Ecclesiastical Sites of Co. Westmeath', in J. Bradley (ed.), *Settlement and Society in Medieval Ireland* (Kilkenny, 1988), 3–31, at pp. 11–12. Bieler's identification of Fordruim with Fardruim in the parish of Killeagh (i.e. N 08 39) is topographically impossible, since the latter cannot have been in Delbnae Assail.

⁷¹ Since the heir of Patrick would certainly have been accompanied, *mias* (< Lat. *mensa*) probably means 'table' rather than 'dish'.

⁷² *Liber Angeli*, §§ 13, 21; Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 25 (on Tamnach), 33 (on Imgóe Már Cérrigi).

occasion he gave him the staff which was given to them by God (that is, its head was in Patrick's lap, its foot in Mo Chae's lap), and that is the *Etech* of Mo Chae of Nendrum. And Mo Chae promised a shaven pig every year to Patrick, and that is what is still given.

The story fits the peppercorn rent and *vice versa*: as Patrick tonsured the swineherd, so Mo Chae gave Patrick a shaven pig; as the one staff lay, its head in Patrick's lap and its foot in Mo Chae's, so Mo Chae's church was united in a wholly honourable and respectful subordination to Patrick.

Less peppercorn-like was the rent formerly paid to the heir of Patrick by a group of churches in Crích Éndai Chonnacht. Again, the rent is justified by a story, considerably more complex than the one about Mo Chae of Nendrum. It arises out of Patrick's visit to Uisnech, the centre of Meath, on his way west towards the Shannon. There he met two other sons of Níall (and thus brothers of Lóegaire, Coirpre and Conall) named Fiachu and Éndae, ancestors of Cenél Fiachach and Cenél nÉndai respectively. Tírechán's story is short and ambiguous:⁷³

In Uisnech of Meath he stayed next to the Rock of Coithrige, but some of his foreign companions were killed in his presence by a son of Fiachu son of Níall. He cursed him, saying, 'There will be no king of your seed, but you shall serve the seed of your brothers.'

The curse is standard, but, in this instance, pointless: Tírechán does not name the offending son nor his brothers. Moreover, one would expect the curse to be directed not against the son, but against the father, Fiachu himself. The particular saint of Cenél Fiachach was Áed mac Bricc whose oldest church, Cell Áir, was a mile to the west of Uisnech.⁷⁴ The claims of Patrick were unlikely to make much progress among them. Also, Cenél Fiachach had probably held the area of Meath around Uisnech but was pushed south by the growing power of Cland Cholmáin, leaving an isolated branch in a confined territory just to the south of Uisnech.⁷⁵ As a result it had been excluded from the kingship of Tara; and, as we have seen in the case of Coirpre mac Néill, it was only the kingship of Tara, nothing less, which concerned Tírechán when he was writing about the Uí Néill.

When we turn to the Tripartite Life, there is no more talk of an offence committed by one of Fiachu's sons. The offence is different and so are the offenders:⁷⁶

⁷³ Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 16.

⁷⁴ Cell Áir > Killare, n 27 48; *Fél.*², Notes, 10 Nov.; Walsh, *Placenames of Westmeath*, pp. 20–2, 348–9.

⁷⁵ See below, pp. 445–6, 452–3, 554–5.

⁷⁶ *VT*² 867–73.

He [Patrick] came again from Tara as far as Uisnech. He attempted to found a church there. Two sons of Níall, that is, Fiachu and Éndae, resisted him. Patrick said to them that it would be their descendants who would inhabit that foundation if he were to receive a welcome from them. They refused him and seized his hand.⁷⁷ 'A curse,' said Patrick, 'on the stones of Uisnech,' said Sechnall [Patrick's companion]. 'Let it be so,' said Patrick. No good use has been made of them from that day onwards: they are not even made into washing stones.

Sechnall's quickness in completing Patrick's sentence for him and so diverting the curse from man to stones did not soften Fiachu's heart: he refused baptism. Nonetheless, the curse had been deflected. This story is thus odd in a different way from Tírechán's version. There the curse was displaced from the father, Fiachu, to one of his sons, and rendered harmless since we were not told which son it was. In the later version the curse is aimed at the father, Fiachu, but deflected on to inanimate stones: the story now indicates a desire to deprive the ancient stone monuments of Uisnech of any sacrality.⁷⁸ Both deflections mark divergences from the standard Old Testament pattern by which the ancestor of an excluded branch is cursed, while his brother is blessed and so becomes the ancestor of kings. This pattern is so standard in Irish hagiography that, at the very least, the contemporary reader of such a text could be expected to bear it in mind, and thus read both Tírechán's and the Tripartite Life's versions precisely as divergences from the norm. Moreover, he would know that Cenél Fiachach had indeed been excluded from the kingship of Tara, just as he might know that, when Patrick offered to found a church at Uisnech to be inhabited by Cenél Fiachach, he was promising what Áed mac Bricc would later provide at Cell Áir. What we do not know, since Cell Áir was not so important a church as to merit notice in the annals, is whether Cenél Fiachach had lost control of it by the time of the Latin ancestor of the Tripartite Life in the late eighth century. If it had, the offer made by Patrick in this passage would be pointedly threatening. There is, perhaps, an implied text running behind both these stories, a text available to an informed contemporary reader and partially recoverable today. In neither extant version does Cenél Fiachach receive the outright condemnation accorded to Cenél Coirpri; yet in both such a condemnation is allowed to lie in the mind.

⁷⁷ 'Seizing someone's hand' was apparently an emphatic gesture used to expel someone: R. Thurneysen, *Irisches Recht*, Abhandlungen der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-hist. Klasse, no. 2 (Berlin, 1931), p. 12; *DIL* s.v. *gabál*.

⁷⁸ The reference may be to 'The Cairn of Fiachu', Carn Fiachach (AU 765.5), but there were many ancient monuments at Uisnech: Lord Killanin and M. V. Duignan, *The Shell Guide to Ireland*, 2nd edn (London, 1967), p. 101.

Unlike Fiachu, Éndae allowed himself to be baptised. Moreover, he gave to Patrick his son, born only the previous night, and with the child went his inheritance, 'that is, every ninth arable strip belonging to Éndae throughout Ireland'. We are to understand, apparently, that Éndae had nine sons; that Éndae's arable lay in strips created by ploughing; and that partition between the sons would distribute the strips of any one son over the whole area, intermingled with those of his brothers, thus yielding the classic open-field pattern. The child, then, Cormac Snithéne, was to be Patrick's man. Patrick, however, handed him over to be fostered by four of his household: Bishop Domnall, Coímid maccu Baird, Do Bonnae maccu Baird, and an unnamed fourth.⁷⁹ Another unusual feature of this transaction was that the fosterage fee, normally given by the natural father to the foster-parents, was given neither by Éndae nor by Patrick, but by Lóegaire mac Néill on behalf of his brother Éndae; the fee consisted of 'the fifteen servile households of Éndae of Artech among the Connachta to the north of Crúachu'.⁸⁰ Patrick seems to have been considered to be the principal foster-father, even though he had delegated the task to the four members of his household and had probably given them the land donated by Lóegaire as a fosterage fee (*iarrath*).

The upshot was that the churches of the four secondary fosterers owed a render to Patrick's heir, 'a calf from every man whenever he should come' as a sign of the reverence due to the foster-father. This was exacted from the churches 'until Núadu, abbot of Armagh, released them . . . That they are not given to them is a matter of deep regret to the community of Patrick'.⁸¹ The community was plainly not satisfied with the performance of Núadu. The fosterage of the boy, Cormac Snithéne, linked together the natural father, Éndae, his uncle, Lóegaire, the primary foster-father, Patrick, and the secondary foster-fathers, Bishop Domnall and his companions. 'The fifteen servile households of Éndae in Airtech among the Connachta' went from hand to hand, from Lóegaire to Éndae, from Éndae to Patrick, and from Patrick to Bishop Domnall and the other three churchmen; finally, the gift created an enduring render payable by the churches of Bishop Domnall, Coímid maccu Baird, Do Bonnae maccu Baird and the unnamed fourth to the

⁷⁹ Cf. Dál mBairdeni, Hogan, *Onom.*, p. 331.

⁸⁰ *VT*² 881-2: A(i)rtrech included Tech Baithín according to *Fél.*² Notes, 19 Feb.; this is Tibohine (M 67 92), later a parish which formed the prebend of Artaugh; Artech seems, therefore, to have been the district to the south of Lough Gara, Co. Roscommon.

⁸¹ *VT*² 887-92; Núadu died in 812; the context of the story may be the visit he made to Connaught in 811: AU 811.1; 812.4.

heir of Patrick in Armagh. The render, 'a calf whenever he should come', seems to be an example of 'the calf of the road' mentioned in the genealogies:⁸² this was a due payable only when the overlord came to the district – hence the phrase 'of the road' in the genealogies and 'whenever he should come' in the Tripartite Life. The genealogical reference suggests that it was a relatively light and honourable obligation. One can see why: although the annals show that the heads of great churches were often on the road, they can hardly have visited each dependent church every year. A due payable only when he came was, therefore, much lighter than the standard annual food-renders of the Irish free peasant-farmer. The obligation claimed from Nendrum was annual but, in itself, largely symbolic; these dues in Artech were much heavier – a calf from every man rather than a pig from the whole community – but they were only paid at irregular intervals.

From Uisnech westwards to the Shannon – the western part of Meath in Tírechán's day – was less promising territory for the heirs of Patrick. To the south lay the minor kingdom of Delbnae Bethra stretching west in the boglands of the river-basin of the Brosna towards the Shannon around Clonmacnois. Like all the border regions around Slieve Bloom between Munster, Leinster and the Uí Néill, Delbnae Bethra was a land of petty kings but great churches: Clonmacnois itself, Líath Mancháin, Rathen.⁸³ In Tethbae, to the north-west, beyond the River Inny, the heirs of Patrick had to contend with the claims of Brigit of Kildare.⁸⁴ Closer to Uisnech on the west and north, almost entirely on the south side of the Inny, lay a group of small kingdoms, Corcu Roíde, Cuircne and Felle. This was the road taken by Tírechán's Patrick before he crossed the River Inny into Southern Tethbae, namely the land around Ardagh in Co. Longford. From Uisnech he first went a few miles north into the territory of Corcu Roíde and there founded two churches.

According to Tírechán, Patrick then immediately crossed the Inny, but the foundation legend of Trim in the Book of Armagh refers to Forгнаide in the land of the Cuircni as the church of a disciple of Patrick.⁸⁵ Professor Byrne has convincingly dated this document to the

⁸² *CGH* i.94 (127 b 20).

⁸³ Clonmacnois is N 00 30; Líath Mancháin (Lemanaghan) N 17 26, Raithen (Rahan) N 25 25; *Fél.*² Notes, 24 Jan. (*R*²), 11 March.

⁸⁴ *Bethu Brigitte*, ed. Ó hAodha, cc. 30–7; *Vita Prima S. Brigitae*, ed. Colgan, cc. 29–36, tr. Connolly, cc. 30–7.

⁸⁵ Forгney, Co. Longford, approximately N 19 54; *Additamenta*, 2.1: 'episcopus Munis i Forгnidui la Cuircniu'.

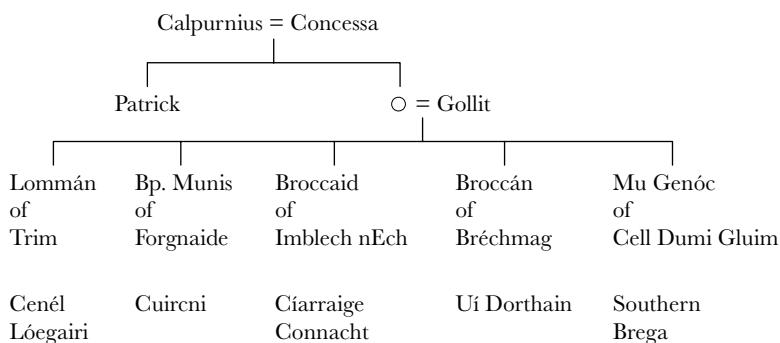


Fig. 1.3. Patrick's fictional kindred

early eighth century. Trim we have met already as the principal church of the kingdom of Cenél Lógairi on the River Boyne; the founder was a Briton, Lommán, subordinated to Patrick as a defensive manoeuvre by the cadet branch of Cenél Lógairi which then held Trim. One aspect of this subordination is a genealogical alliance (fig. 1.3).⁸⁶

'This is Patrick's own kindred, by consanguinity and by grace, by faith and teaching; and everything which they obtained in land, in estates, in churches and all offerings they granted to Patrick for ever.'⁸⁷ In a text written no later than the early eighth century and appended to the *B* MSS of Adomnán's Life of Columba, there is a very similar picture of Columba's sisters' sons implying that they formed a natural network of alliances for the saint.⁸⁸ Such a network is not very different from that created by the fosterage of Cormac Sníthéne, the son of Éndae. There the secular patron was Lóegaire son of Níall, ancestor of Cenél Lógairi but portrayed by Tírechán as, at the time of Patrick, the chief among the sons of Níall; here the focus of the alliance is Lommán, patron saint of Trim, the principal church of Cenél Lógairi. The fosterage alliance bound together Lóegaire in Brega, Éndae in Uisnech and among the Cíarraige north-west of Crúachain in Connaught, and various churches among the Cíarraige. This alliance with his sisters' sons bound Patrick to churches in Brega, among the Cuircni on the east side of the Shannon above Athlone, and among the Cíarraige of Connaught. The territorial range suggests wide claims made for the power of Lóegaire as king of Tara, extending west across the Shannon.

⁸⁶ *Additamenta*, 2.1, followed by *VT*² 712–20; but contrast *VT*² 845–8.

⁸⁷ *Additamenta*, 2.2.

⁸⁸ Adomnán, *VSC*, Appendix, ed. and tr. A. O. Anderson and M. O. Anderson, *Adomnán's Life of Columba*, 2nd edn, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford, 1991), pp. 238–9.

The Tripartite Life reports this alliance for Bishop Munis of Forznaide, but also another story according to which he was a kinsman of Bishop Mél of Ardagh and of Rióc of Inis Bó Finne, an island church in Lough Ree.⁸⁹ Since Ardagh was the principal church of Southern Tethbae, itself the northern neighbour of Cuircni, across the River Inny, this was a local alliance between two principal churches of neighbouring kingdoms; it was quite different in scope from the alliance in the *Additamenta*, between distant churches. It is significant that the Tripartite Life is not unduly apologetic in reporting both versions of the kinship of Munis. Having recounted one of them, it adds, 'as the communities of their churches say – and that should not be denied'.⁹⁰ Just as competing versions of the genealogies of the kings were to hand, so also were competing versions of the genealogies of the saints.⁹¹

To the north of the River Inny lay 'the two Tethbai', southern Tethbae around Ardagh, and northern Tethbae around Granard. Ardagh in southern Tethbae was a church in which Brigit of Kildare had a strong interest. Both Brigit's hagiographers and Tírechán agree, however, that the man who mattered was Bishop Mél rather than the king.⁹² He was plainly the *érlam*, 'patron saint', of Ardagh, and any claims to ecclesiastical overlordship over, or alliance with, Ardagh had to be made in terms of a story about him.⁹³ The Tripartite Life, however, while putting the king firmly in his place has a very instructive tale to tell. The king, Maine mac Néill, willingly accepted baptism at Patrick's hands. He then brought to Patrick a kinswoman, who was pregnant, and asked Patrick to bless the child in her womb and the woman herself. He did not ask for her baptism but a blessing, both for her and for her child. This immediately switches the issue from that of conversion to royal succession: the blessing in question is again that of Isaac and Jacob.⁹⁴

When Patrick stretched out his hand over her womb to bless it, he retracted it, saying, 'I know not; God knows.' That was a true saying on his part. However, he blessed the woman and the child, but he knew by the spirit of prophecy that

⁸⁹ VT² 895–902 and 930–1. This Inis Bó Finne is Inchbofin, N 05 54, as opposed to Inishboffin, the church founded by Bishop Colmán off the west coast of Connemara (Bede, *HE* iv.4).

⁹⁰ VT² 898–9.

⁹¹ P. Ó Riain, 'Towards a Methodology in Early Irish Hagiography', *Peritia*, 1 (1982), 157–8.

⁹² *Bethu Brigte*, c. 30; *Vita Prima S. Brigitae*, ed. Colgan, c. 29, tr. Connolly, c. 30. Mél is in Tírechán's list of Patrick's bishops, *Collectanea*, 6, and Patrick is said to have consecrated him in c. 16; in VT² 951 Patrick does not consecrate Mél, but leaves him and his brother Méléchú at Ardagh.

⁹³ On the *érlam* see below, p. 257, and T. M. Charles-Edwards, '*Érlam*: The Patron-Saint of an Irish Church', in R. Sharpe and A. Thacker (eds.), *Local Saints and Churches* (forthcoming).

⁹⁴ VT² 954–62. The *Notulae* break off before Patrick reaches Tethbae, so that there is no certainty that this story goes back to the eighth century.

it was the grandson of the accursed Coirpre which was in her womb, namely Túathal Máelgarb. Patrick said, 'That is ill-omened, O slender Maine; there will be no king descended from you till Doomsday.' Maine abased himself before Patrick and did penance, and Patrick said, 'There will be no king who will not have your support, and it is your binding which will last the longest in Ireland.'

Just as Rachel's stratagem obtained the blessing for Jacob rather than for the first-born Esau, so here, even though Patrick perceives Maine's request as a trick worthy of punishment, nonetheless the blessing is effective: Túathal Máelgarb, 'Túathal the Bald Brute', will indeed succeed to the kingship of Tara in spite of being the grandson of the accursed Coirpre mac Néill. Yet the blessing is confined to Túathal; none of his descendants will reign over Tara. On Maine, however, the effect is ambiguous: he and his descendants are excluded even more effectively than are those of Coirpre, and yet his support and, it is implied, that of his descendants will be crucial for the one who does succeed to Tara.⁹⁵ Again, the kingship in question is assumed, without any need of an explicit statement, to be that of Tara: Maine's descendants will rule without question in southern Tethbae, and yet Patrick says, 'there will be no king descended from you till Doomsday'. The king of Cenél Maini, ruling over southern Tethbae, will be the king-maker, but never the king, of Tara. His role is to bring about an *ernaidm*, 'vicarious binding', of the kingship to the king-to-be. This word *ernaidm* was used of the contract whereby a woman's kinsmen betrothed her to a bridegroom; its use here thus suggests the old and long-enduring notion that a man became king by being married to the kingship, traditionally portrayed as a goddess of sovereignty.⁹⁶ Later references to royal inauguration after the Norman invasion of Ireland envisage the principal client-kings playing a role in the ceremony itself, in addition to their critical role in offering support to their favoured contender.⁹⁷ This double function of the principal client-kings, both ritual and political, may lie behind this passage about Maine mac Néill. His political support will be indispensable ('There will be no king who will not have your support'), but it will be Maine's act of betrothal 'which will last the longest in

⁹⁵ Compare *Vita S. Eogani*, c. 15 (ed. Heist, *Vitae*, p. 403), where the descendants of Lugaid mac Sétni are excluded from the kingship but 'will be the counsellors and judges of kings, and among your people no one's royal authority will endure except with their [sc. the descendants'] counsel'.

⁹⁶ M. Herbert, 'Goddess and King: The Sacred Marriage in Early Ireland', in L. O. Fradenburg (ed.), *Women and Sovereignty* [= *Cosmos*, 7] (Edinburgh, 1992), pp. 264–75 (which includes references to earlier literature).

⁹⁷ K. Simms, *From Kings to Warlords: The Changing Political Structure of Gaelic Ireland in the Later Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 1987), pp. 21–36.

Ireland'. His *ernaidm* is one among others – presumably those of the other client-kings, or at least, principal client-kings – yet his will endure longer than theirs. Not only will no one gain the kingship without his support but his favoured candidate will retain the kingship longer than anyone else. The goddess of sovereignty was notoriously fickle (one such, Medb, was 'never without one man in the shadow of another');⁹⁸ but, with Maine to guarantee the union, it would at least endure longer than it would have done otherwise. Any prudent king of Tara would thus cultivate the support of the king of Cenél Maini above all others.

The text of the Tripartite Life is very dense at this point, but if the reading just given is correct it gives us a view of the inauguration of the kings of Tara propounded by Armagh at a time when it was the principal ecclesiastical ally of one of the two contending dynasties among the Uí Néill, Cenél nÉogain.⁹⁹ One striking aspect of this conception is that the rivals of Cenél nÉogain were neighbours of Cenél Maini to the east, Cland Cholmáin, the ruling dynasty of Meath, while the descendants of the accursed Coirpre ruled another neighbouring kingdom, that of northern Tethbae, Patrick's next destination. There may be a specific context for this story – a particular bid by Cenél nÉogain for the support of Cenél Maini against the latter's more natural overlord, Cland Cholmáin – which is not now recoverable.¹⁰⁰

Tírechán, unlike the Tripartite Life, makes no mention of Maine son of Níall, although he mentions all the other ancestors of major dynasties among the southern Uí Néill. There was a kingdom of Uí Maini on the other side of the Shannon; its northern frontier lay close to the monastery of Roscommon, almost due west of Ardagh.¹⁰¹ On this basis it has been suggested that Cenél Maini was adopted into the Uí Néill.¹⁰² Tírechán did not have a story explaining the exclusion of Cenél Maini because, in his day, they were not Uí Néill and no such story was necessary; the Tripartite Life, on the other hand, shows that by the end of the ninth century, at the latest, such a story was needed. Alternatively, the influence of the Brigitine connection may have been too strong in Southern Tethbae for Tírechán's Patrick to make any serious headway.

⁹⁸ *Táin Bó Cúailnge* from the *Book of Leinster*, ed. C. O'Rahilly (Dublin, 1967), line 37 and n.

⁹⁹ See below, pp. 51, 563.

¹⁰⁰ Except that Cenél Coirpri were normally allies of Cenél Conaill, northern rivals of Cenél nÉogain, so that local rivalry in Tethbae may have moved Cenél Maini closer to Cenél nÉogain.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 28.1 (Uí Maini includes Fidarte = Fuerty, M 82 62), and *VT*² 1185–6, according to which Imgoe Baislice was on the boundary between Uí Maini and Mag nAí; this may be Emmoo, M 91 66: Swift, 'Background to the Treatment of the Connachta', p. 88.

¹⁰² Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, p. 92.

Northern Tethbae was another part of Patrick's kinship network.¹⁰³ His bishop, whom he placed in Granard, was Gúasacht son of the Miliucc maccu Búain, king and druid, whom he had served as slave and herdsman in the province of Ulster.¹⁰⁴ Patrick's relationship to Gúasacht was that of foster-brother, one 'reared together', *comaltae*. Although Miliucc was Patrick's master, not his foster-father, domestic proximity could give rise to kinship. Nearby, in Clúain Brónaig, Gúasacht's sisters established a nunnery, 'and that is why the head of the church of Granard always ordains the head of a nun in Clúain Brónaig'.¹⁰⁵ Kinship even explained the rights of a head of an episcopal church over a monastic community within his diocese.

(II) THE LANDS OF THE CONNACHTA¹⁰⁶

For Tírechán, the Shannon was the boundary between the lands of the Uí Néill and those of their remote kinsmen, the Connachta.¹⁰⁷ The name of the modern province, Connacht (or, in its anglicised form, Connaught), derives from the earlier Connachta. Connachta, however, was not a name for a territory but for a group of dynasties claiming descent from a legendary king, Conn Céthachach, 'Conn of the Hundred Battles'.¹⁰⁸ To avoid confusion between the dynasties and their province it is convenient to use the anglicised form, Connaught, for the province and Connachta for the dynasties. There is no early designation of the province other than as the land of the Connachta or, perhaps, 'the western district'; in this Connaught is different from the midlands, where the lands of the Uí Néill were also known by their territorial names, Brega, Mide and Tethbae.

There is another problem about Tírechán's Connachta and their lands. He defines their boundary with the southern Uí Néill as the Shannon. Their western boundary was not an issue since it was the Atlantic. Their boundary to the south, with Munster, was not his concern, since his Patrick never went that way. The problem arises with

¹⁰³ *VT*² 995–1003.

¹⁰⁴ Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 16.6; 49.1; there is a problem with Tírechán's very succinct text in c. 16.6, which is best understood in the light of the Tripartite Life, *VT*² 995–1001. Bieler's punctuation makes it appear as though Gúasacht's church were *aeclessia Bili*; however, there should probably be a full stop or semi-colon after *fundauit* (*Patrician Texts*, p. 136, l. 21). Granard is N 32 81.

¹⁰⁵ Clúain Brónaig is Clonbroney, N 25 78; 'ordain' is used here of the veiling of a nun by which she was married to Christ.

¹⁰⁶ The following discussion is indebted to Swift, 'Background to the Treatment of the Connachta'. ¹⁰⁷ Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 17. ¹⁰⁸ See below, pp. 465, 601.

the north-eastern boundary. Tírechán's work tails off at the end with a cursory treatment of the peoples of north-eastern Ireland and a yet more rapid excursion southwards, through Leinster into Munster. The text thus presents an unfinished appearance. As it stands, however, the principal part of the work consists of two books, the first devoted to the lands of the Uí Néill and the second to the kingdoms of the Connachta.¹⁰⁹ The Uí Néill in Tírechán's scheme were solely the southern Uí Néill, rulers of the midlands. The northern Uí Néill dynasties, Cenél Conaill, Cenél nÉogain and Cenél nÉndai, thus had no obvious place in his text. He disposed of them in different ways. Éogan and Éndae were simply omitted;¹¹⁰ Conall, however, was a more difficult problem since his descendants, Cenél Conaill, were one of the two most powerful dynasties of the Uí Néill in the seventh century.¹¹¹ Admittedly they had their own saint in Columba of Iona and were never likely to become devoted adherents of Patrick,¹¹² but they were simply too important to ignore altogether. Conall, therefore, was included when Patrick's circuit of the northern half of Ireland reached the lands of his descendants, Tír Conaill, most of the modern Co. Donegal.¹¹³ Tírechán thus had, to our eyes, a difficulty: the Uí Néill belonged to Book I and to the midlands; yet now he had to include an Uí Néill dynasty whose kingdom lay in the north-west, only reached by Patrick long after he had left the midlands.

Yet to Tírechán, his treatment of Cenél Conaill does not seem to have been anomalous. The end of his account of the Connachta, and thus the end also of his Book II, appears to come at chap. 48, where he has a note looking back at the previous part of the text – a note which also shows that he was entirely conscious of the artificiality of the scheme whereby he brought all of his material within the scope of a single circuit by Patrick around the northern half of Ireland:

Patrick crossed the Shannon on three occasions and spent seven years in the western region; and from Mag Tóchuir he came to Dul Óchéni and founded seven churches there.

This 'western region', *occidentalis plaga*, was bounded by the Shannon as were 'the lands of the Connachta', *regiones Connacht*, in chap. 17. Yet the western region appears also to have been bounded by the Foyle, which

¹⁰⁹ Tírechán makes this division himself, *Collectanea*, 17.

¹¹⁰ In the Tripartite Life, however, Cenél nÉogain are given a treatment appropriate for Armagh's most favoured dynasty (from the 730s): *VT*² 1755–805. ¹¹¹ See below, pp. 493–4.

¹¹² Contrast the description of Éogan given in the Tripartite Life, written in the period of the alliance between Armagh and Cenél nÉogain: he is termed by Patrick 'my faithful friend', 'amicus mihi fidelis', *VT*² 1479. ¹¹³ Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 47.

Patrick would have had to cross coming from Mag Tóchuir (the northern part of Inishowen) to Dul Óchéni, the valley of the River Faughan in Co. Londonderry.

The passage marking the north-eastern limit of the lands of the Connachta was copied into the Tripartite Life, but topographically it was moved south-west.¹¹⁴ Instead of coming after the passage of the Foyle, it came after Patrick had crossed the Rover Drowes, on the southern boundary of what is now Co. Donegal. The author of the Tripartite Life evidently took Tírechán's passage as indicating the north-eastern limit of the Connachta, but as being wrongly placed.¹¹⁵ The effect of his relocation of the boundary to the Drowes was to remove the kingdoms of Cenél Conaill and Cenél nÉogain from the lands of the Connachta; for him they were just part of 'the North', *ind Fochlae*, and were no longer to be reckoned, as they were in Tírechán's *Collectanea*, as parts of 'the western region'.¹¹⁶ These changes in the geographical ordering of Ireland reflect a political development whereby the Uí Néill, once part of the Connachta, were becoming more clearly separate. Yet, even in the Tripartite Life, where the Drowes marked the boundary of the province, one Uí Néill kingdom, Cenél Coirpri Dromma Cliab, was still within Connaught.

Tírechán's account of the Connachta gives considerable space to his own kindred, the Uí Amolngada, whose kingdom lay on the western side of the River Moy in northern Co. Mayo. This is unsurprising, and not just because Tírechán would have been especially well informed about the traditions of his native kingdom. This district contained the only topographical feature in Ireland to which Patrick himself referred by name, the *Silva Vocluti*, later known as *Caill Fochlaid*, 'the Wood of Fochloth'. Here at least there is a good chance that, however distorted were the Patrician traditions recorded by Tírechán, there was some genuine connection between them and the historical Patrick.

Yet Tírechán's other material on the Connachta, leaving aside the Uí Amolngada, shows signs of having been collected by him rather than having been composed out of nothing more than the ambitions of the heirs of Patrick. Among the Uí Néill, Tírechán's Patrick backed the rulers of Brega, who in the next generation repaid his faith by tearing themselves apart. Across the Shannon, among the Connachta, his Patrick already knew that he had backed two losers, but did not know

¹¹⁴ *VT*² 1699–703.

¹¹⁵ Compare Patrick's valediction to the Connachta, *VT*² 1702–3, with that to Munster, *VT*² 255–73.

¹¹⁶ For 'the North' cf. AU 779.10.



Map 4. Peoples and kingdoms of Connaught

what to do about it. The great dynasty of the seventh century had been the Uí Fhiachrach Aidne in the southern part of Co. Galway, together with their kinsmen, the Uí Fhiachrach Múaide in north-east Co. Mayo and the adjacent area of Co. Sligo. In the eighth century it would be increasingly supplanted by the Uí Briúin. But the community of Patrick had close relations neither with the old overkings nor with the new. Its favoured sons had been the Uí Ailella, Uí Amolngada and various branches of the Cíarraige. The most important of the Cíarraige,

Cíarraige nAí (Cíarraige of Mag nAí) belonged to eastern Connaught, to the area of the dryest and most easily worked soils in the province. Within Mag nAí, which stretched approximately from Roscommon town to Bellanagare, lay the traditional capital of Connaught, Crúachain, an area densely packed with prehistoric monuments; like Tara it already in the seventh century encapsulated the glories of a royal and heroic past.¹¹⁷ And as Patrick's stay in Brega revolved around the royal sites of Tara and Tailtiu, so in Connaught Patrick's journeys went around Crúachain; yet here the inner core of the ancient site itself was never conquered as Patrick conquered Tara.

Mag nAí, however, was only one of the centres of power in Connaught; others were Aidne in the south of what is now Co. Galway, on the borders of Co. Clare; the valley of the Moy in northern Co. Mayo; and, finally, the area around the modern town of Sligo. Whereas the main territories of the southern Uí Néill were all in the great midland plain stretching west from the Irish Sea to the Shannon, territorial power in Connaught was more dispersed. The Uí Briúin were becoming the principal power of Mag nAí, at the expense of the Uí Ailella and the Cíarraige nAí, but they had to contend with the Uí Fiachrach who straddled the province with their kingdoms of Aidne in the south and the Moy in the north. None of these great dynasties was a strong supporter of the heirs of Patrick, apart from the Uí Amolngada, who were an offshoot of the Uí Fiachrach. Tírechán's account of the Connachta, therefore, is most instructive on failing and failed dynasties; it provides an excellent counter-balance to his account of the southern Uí Néill.

The first such failing dynasty was the Uí Ailella. Patrick crossed the Shannon well to the north, just below Lough Allen, from the territory of Mag Réin to the lands of the Uí Ailella, one of 'the three Connachta', the traditional ruling kindreds of the province, Uí Ailella, Uí Fiachrach and Uí Briúin. The main territories of the Uí Ailella by Tírechán's time lay between Elphin to the south and Riverstown to the north. The northern part of this territory, beyond the Curlew Mountains and Lough Key, consists of two parallel river valleys running NNW to SSE, the River Unshin on the west side flowing towards Sligo Bay and the River Feorish on the east flowing south-east to join the Shannon.

¹¹⁷ M. Herity, 'A Survey of the Royal Site of Cruachain in Connacht. I: Introduction, the Monuments and Topography', *JRSAL*, 113 (1983), 121–42; idem, 'A Survey of the Royal Site of Cruachain in Connacht. II: The Prehistoric Monuments', *JRSAL*, 114 (1984), 125–38; idem, 'A Survey of the Royal Site of Cruachain in Connacht. III: Ringforts and Ecclesiastical Sites', *JRSAL*, 117 (1987), 125–41; idem, 'Motes and Mounds at Royal Sites in Ireland', *JRSAL*, 123 (1993), 127–51; J. Waddell, 'Rathcroghan – A Royal Site in Connacht', *Journal of Irish Archaeology*, 1 (1983), 21–46; idem, 'Rathcroghan in Connacht', *Emania*, 5 (1988), 5–18, with corrections in *Emania*, 6 (1989), 42.

This was the setting for one of the principal mythological tales, 'The Second Battle of Mag Tuired', in which the Túatha Dé Danann, 'the peoples of the Goddess Danu', defeated the Fomorians, a version of the struggle of the Gods against the Giants also known from other early mythologies.¹¹⁸ The earliest extant version of the story is ninth-century, probably from just after our period, since it implies that the Vikings were the new Fomorians (the Giants) and it may even refer to specific events of the 850s.¹¹⁹ But the way in which the story is placed in one particular part of Ireland, with numerous references to sites, suggests an earlier tradition. The places have no relevance to the main Viking attacks but rather to the wars between the peoples of north-east Connaught, on the one hand, and the Uí Néill lineages of Cenél Coirpri and Cenél Conaill, on the other. These wars were common in the seventh century and the opening years of the eighth, and there is a good chance that the story acquired its topographical definition at that period.

In the story the great attack of the Fomorians, when they come in many fleets from the Hebrides, opens with a landing on the coast at the northern end of Co. Sligo, north of Drumcliff, near Cliffony. From there they march southwards into Connaught meeting the Túatha Dé Danann on the north-east side of Lough Arrow, in the heart of Uí Ailella territory. The townlands Moytirra West and Moytirra East preserve the name of the site of the battle, Mag Tuired.¹²⁰ Just to the north-east of the townlands of Moytirra is the site of the church of Senchue (Shancough);¹²¹ its patron, Ailbe, was said by Tírechán to have been ordained by Patrick when the latter first entered Connaught; according to the annals he died in 542. 'The Second Battle of Mag Tuired' could well have been written at a local church such as Senchue. Senchue itself is not mentioned in the tale, but a gloss, probably a later addition, mentions another local church, Echaineach.¹²² This appears to have been the church of Bishop Maine, who, according to the Tripartite Life, partially saved a branch of the Uí Ailella, the Maicc Eirc in the area around the modern town of Boyle, from one of Patrick's more savage curses.¹²³ A

¹¹⁸ *Cath Maige Tuired: The Second Battle of Mag Tuired*, ed. and tr. E. Gray, Irish Texts Society, 52 (1982).

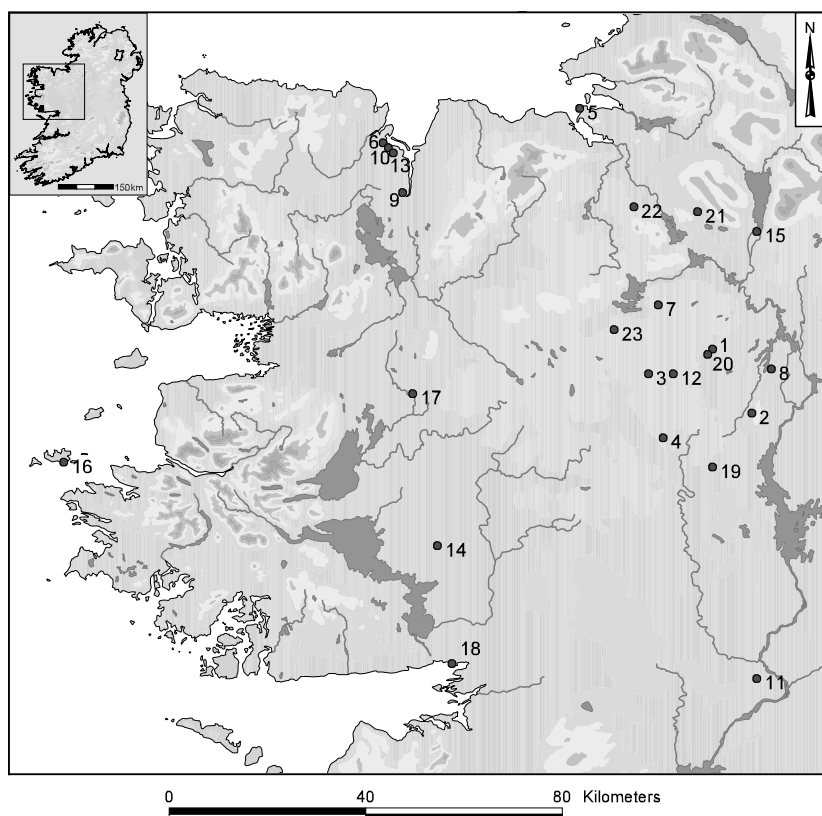
¹¹⁹ P. Mac Cana, 'The Influence of the Vikings on Celtic Literature', in B. Ó Cuív (ed.), *The Impact of the Scandinavian Invasions on the Celtic-Speaking Peoples, c. 800–1100 AD* (Dublin, 1974), p. 94.

¹²⁰ G 81 14.

¹²¹ The site is marked on the 1:50000 Discovery Series map at G 823 163.

¹²² *Cath Maige Tuired*, ed. Gray, § 84; but this is only in a gloss, 'Alloed Echae, i.e. Echaineach', and the topography indicates that the gloss is wrong: the Morrigan was washing in the Unshin with one foot at Lisconny (G 70 22) on the north-east side of the river, and the other at Alloed Echae on the south-west side. Since Echaineach was at G 78 09, some 10 miles SSE of Lisconny, the gloss makes it difficult to imagine how even the monstrous war-goddess might accomplish this feat.

¹²³ VT² 1664–75; 1231–3 appears to be another, briefer version of the same incident.



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|--|---|
| 1. Ail Find / Elphin | 13. Domnach Mór 'super siluam Fochluth' |
| 2. Badgna / Bawne | 14. Domnach Mór Maige Séolai |
| 3. Baislec / Baslick | 15. Dumae Gráid |
| 4. Bri Garad / Oran | 16. Inis Bó Finde / Inishboffin |
| 5. Caisel Irróe | 17. Mag nÉo na Saxan / Mayo |
| 6. Cell Alaid / Killala | 18. Ross Caimm / Roscam |
| 7. Cell Adrachtæ / Killaraght | 19. Ross Commáin / Roscommon |
| 8. Cell Mór Glas / Kilmore | 20. Senchell Dumaige / Shankill |
| 9. Cell Mór Óchtair Múaide / Kilmoremy | 21. Senchóe, Senchue / Shancough |
| 10. Cell Róe Móre / Kilroe | 22. Tamnach / Tawnagh |
| 11. Clúain Fertæ / Clonfert | 23. Tech mBaithín / Tibohine |
| 12. Crúachain (Crúachu) / Rathcroghan | |

Map 5. Sites in Connaught

third church of the same area, Tamnach, was said by Tírechán to have been founded by Patrick and by Mathona, the sister of Patrick's heir at Armagh, Benignus.¹²⁴ We shall return to Tamnach in a later chapter, but it is important to notice here that Tírechán says that Tamnach subsequently acquired bishops, consecrated by Patrick's disciple, Brón of Caisel Irrae, close to the town of Sligo, and Bitheus (Betheus, Bite) of Imblech nÓnonn at Elphin.¹²⁵ Tírechán's perception of Patrick's activities in Connaught turns around a few ecclesiastical networks, one of which centred on Brón while another included Bitheus. It was a perception in which bishops were both numerous and influential.

Tírechán's interest in the Uí Ailella allows us a glimpse of some local churches already existing in the seventh century and also networks of bishops said to belong to the Uí Ailella. The first is centred on Céthech of Cell Garad, in Tírechán Cethiachus of Brí Garad (fig. 1.4).¹²⁶

The most striking aspect of this group of brothers is the wide distribution, within Connaught, of their churches. Cell Garad lay on the southern edge of Mag nAí, Cell Bineóin in or on the edge of the kingdom of Uí Briúin Seólaí around Lough Hacket. These churches thus lay on the edge of the two major Uí Briúin kingdoms. Another similar case is the church of Felartus, Domnach Mór Maige Seólaí ('the Great Church of the Plain of Seólae'), since Felarte was also said to belong to the Uí Ailella.¹²⁷ Mucnoe's church, given the antiquity of the *domnach* churches as a whole, and the position of this one within the Wood of Fochloth where Patrick appears to have worked as a slave, has good claims to belong to the first generation of foundations in northern Mayo.

For Tírechán, Céthech, Bitheus and Mucnoe were brothers and all belonged to the Uí Ailella. This is unlikely to be entirely true, since Céthech was probably, to judge by his name, a British missionary. He appears in a text, not part of Tírechán's *Collectanea* but in the Book of

¹²⁴ Grid ref.: G 73 17; Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 24–5, 46. If this was the Tamnach mentioned in a record of a grant in the *Addimenta* in the Book of Armagh (11.1), it would appear to have been a much more recent acquisition, but Tamnach is a common name.

¹²⁵ Caisel Irróe may be the Killaspugbrone (Ceall easpuig Brón, 'The Church of Bishop Brón') at G 60 37 (just by Killaspug Point). According to Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 45.2–4, Patrick prophesied that the sea would drive Brón's heirs to move closer to the River Sligo; according to *VT*² 1615–16, Vikings laid the church waste (one of the few references to Vikings in the text).

¹²⁶ Cell Garad or Brí Garad was by the River Suck at M 77 70. Tírechán's Brer garad is very probably a scribal error for Breg Garad (gen. sg. of Brí Garad); cf. *de cacumine Garad*, Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 29.2, where *cacumen* could be a translation of *brí*. The name of the well Úarán Garad is preserved in the modern Oran (the round tower is at M 77 69). ¹²⁷ Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 22.1; 30; 35.

Céthech bp. of Cell Garad	Binén/Benignus (not the heir of Patrick but the saint of Cell Bineóin > Kilbennan M 41 54)	Mucnoe of Domnach Mór in the Wood of Fochloth
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Fig. 1.4. Uí Ailella bishops

Armagh, about Patrick's relationship with Mag nÁi.¹²⁸ There the form of the name is Caetiachus, which is very likely to be British, whereas Tírechán's versions of the name are more Irish.¹²⁹ In this text in the Book of Armagh we are told that a man named Hercaith gave his son Feradach to Patrick; that Patrick took the son to Rome where he was trained and given the name Sachellus;¹³⁰ and that Sachellus received from Patrick 'a portion of the relics of Peter and Paul, Lawrence and Stephen, which are in Armagh'. So far the text seems to be building up Sachellus as one of the most important lieutenants employed by Patrick. Only one other disciple (Olcán of Armoy) is said to have received a portion of the relics of the Roman saints.¹³¹ The last part of the text, however, takes a very different course: Céthech and Sachellus were said to have ordained bishops, priests, deacons and clerics in Mag nÁi without the knowledge and consent of Patrick. Patrick accused them of disobedience and, although they went to Armagh and did penance, Patrick's verdict was: 'Your churches will not be great.'

Céthech was Patrick's principal bishop for the Uí Ailella; Sachellus was bishop of Baislec, the main church of Cíarraige nÁi. In Tírechán's *Collectanea* both Céthech and Sachellus appear among Patrick's inner group of collaborators. The situation disclosed by this text is curious however: Mag nÁi was perhaps the most important area of good land in Connaught; the Cíarraige and the Uí Ailella had much closer ties with

¹²⁸ Book of Armagh, 8^vb, ed. Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, p. 122. Bieler's heading 'Tírechán' on pp. 122–3, is misleading; the *Collectanea* begins at f. 9^vb on pp. 124–5 of Bieler's edition. On this text see C. Doherty, 'The Basilica in Early Ireland', *Peritia*, 3 (1984), 303–15.

¹²⁹ Tírechán's forms are Cethiacus, *Collectanea*, 6.2 (list of bishops) and Cethiachus, 14.6, 7. The latter shows Irish lenition throughout, the former only in the *th*. Caetiachus (*Patrician Texts*, ed. Bieler, 122), on the other hand, has no trace of Irish lenition, and *Caet-* is likely to be a Late Latin reverse spelling for *cēt-* > Welsh *coed*; Caetiachus would give Welsh *coediog* 'woody'; perhaps it was a nickname.

¹³⁰ Although there are later examples of such renamings at Rome (for example, the Anglo-Saxons Clement–Willibrord and Boniface–Wynfrith) this is probably a device to give a more Irish and more local identity to a man who had a Latin name (*sacellus* from *sacer*) from the start because he was an early missionary from outside Ireland; cf. D. McManus, 'A Chronology of the Latin Loan-Words in Early Irish', *Ériu*, 34 (1983), 50.

¹³¹ Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 48.

Patrick than their rivals, the Uí Briúin Aí; and yet Patrick denounced these natural allies.

These were not the deeds of Patrick himself in the fifth century but rather reactions to seventh-century political events. The name *Baislec* or *Basilica Sanctorum* may have been given to the church only after it received the relics from Armagh, probably in the middle of the seventh century.¹³² In the fuller form, 'Basilica of the Saints', the name is probably derived from the Frankish Latin term for an extramural cemetery church established on the site of graves thought to be those of saints.¹³³ The material on *basilica* in the early eighth-century *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* shows that the Irish associated the term with graves, but also, via etymology, with kings: the original *basilica*, so we are told, was a royal mausoleum.¹³⁴ The word *baislec* itself was probably borrowed into Irish no later than the middle of the sixth century:¹³⁵ at that period it could have referred to the cemetery of the kings of Cíarraige nAí, later the local dynasty. In the sixth century hardly anyone was buried in an ecclesiastical graveyard; this practice began, however, with kings, often, perhaps, by building a church on the site of an existing cemetery. At that stage, therefore, there would be good reason for adverting to the etymological connection between *basilica* 'church' and the Greek *basileus* 'king'. What may then have happened is that the relics came to Armagh in the course of the attested interchange of letters and envoys c. 629–40; that a portion was given to Baislec in the middle of the seventh century, denoting its status as Armagh's most favoured church in Connaught and also giving it a fuller name, *Basilica Sanctorum*; but that the increasingly powerful Uí Briúin Aí found it unacceptable to have a nearby episcopal church possessing some of the most sacred relics within Ireland, and yet associated with a client kingdom. Moreover, the terms in which Patrick is made to utter his condemnation suggest that the heirs of Sachellus at Baislec and of Céthech at Brí Garad had been responsible for ordaining clerics throughout Mag nAí; this power may have been particularly obnoxious to the Uí Briúin Aí.

¹³² *Basilica Sanctorum*: *ibid.*, c. 29.

¹³³ For example, Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum Decem*, ed. B. Krusch and W. Levison, MGH SRM i.1 (Hanover, 1951), vi.46 (Chilperic is buried in the basilica of St Vincent outside the walls of Paris, while his widow, Fredegund, took refuge in the *ecclesia*, the cathedral within the walls); ix.35 (the first sentence). Cf. also Basaleg in Gwent, a similarly rare name in Wales.

¹³⁴ *Hib.* xviii.7 (where *basilica* = 'grave'), xlv.20 (kings).

¹³⁵ Doherty, 'The Basilica', 309–10, suggests that the name is as old as the fifth century; this may be so, but the only clear evidence is that it is earlier than syncope, usually dated to the middle of the sixth century, but later than Sachellus < Sacellus (if it were of the same date as Sachellus it should have been **baislech*): McManus, 'A Chronology of the Latin Loan-Words', 62.

This reconstruction of the background to the text may explain Sachellus but it leaves Céthech's role unclear. In the sentence on the ordaining of clerics in Mag nAí without Patrick's consent, Céthech is named first, even though the previous narrative is all to do with Sachellus. A possible explanation arises from the site of his church, Brí Garad or Cell Garad, close to the famous well Úarán Garad. Úarán, 'the Cold One', gave its name to the modern parish of Oran, Co. Roscommon, where the remains of a round tower mark the site of the pre-Norman church. Oran lies only two miles north of the River Suck, at this point probably the southern boundary of Mag nAí. The possible significance of Céthech's church is evident as soon as one remembers that the lands known to belong to the Uí Ailella lay to the north of Mag nAí, the church of Elphin being close to their southern boundary. It becomes even clearer when one remembers that the name Céthech is likely to be British and early. Céthech, that is, was probably a British missionary of the fifth or early sixth century. His attachment to the Uí Ailella was the result of an adoption by that dynasty of the saint and his church. It cannot be said that Céthech just happened to be of the Uí Ailella and that his church just happened to be near the southern edge of Mag nAí. It is far more likely that Céthech and Brí Garad were attached to the Uí Ailella when the latter were the dominant dynasty of Mag nAí and thus before the rise of the Uí Briúin Aí.¹³⁶ This hypothesis will help to explain why the Uí Ailella were one of 'the three Connachta', the ruling dynasties of the province, even though in the historical period they never produced a single king of the province. The text in the Book of Armagh is, then, an attack on the reputation of Céthech as well as Sachellus, and thus of Brí Garad as well as Baislec. The text had two victims: Sachellus, associated with the Cíarraige nAí, and Céthech, associated with the Uí Ailella; the beneficiaries were the Uí Briúin Aí.

The ecclesiastical allies of the Uí Briúin Aí were, in the first place, Clonmacnois, shown by Tírechán to have been active in seeking to gain control of Connaught churches in the late seventh century,¹³⁷ and subsequently also Roscommon, a few miles to the east of Brí Garad. Roscommon advanced to a place among the principal churches of the

¹³⁶ On the Uí Briúin Aí and Uí Briúin Seolai see Swift, 'Background to the Treatment of the Connachta', 142–63.

¹³⁷ Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 29, 47. 4. Cf. below, pp. 561–2, on the *cánai* jointly promulgated by kings of the Connachta and Clonmacnois.

province under its abbot and then patron-saint, Commán (*ob.* 747).¹³⁸ With the rise of Roscommon, the only remaining card available to Brí Garad was its famous well, Úarán Garad. This short text in the Book of Armagh, once set in context, reveals the instability of political hegemonies and thus of ecclesiastical authority.

After leaving Mag nAí, Tírechán's Patrick travelled through a series of minor kingdoms. In one of them, he had an encounter with another well, which shows that, even in Tírechán's mind, there was a connection between wells and pre-Christian belief. By this stage he was in the territory of the Corcu Themne, part of the larger district of Cerae.¹³⁹ This well was 'the well of Findmag [Fair Plain] which is called Slán [Whole]'. Patrick came there

because he was told that druids honoured the well and offered gifts to it taking it as a god. It was a square-shaped well and there was a square-shaped stone at the mouth of the well, and the water used to come over the stone . . . and unbelievers said that a certain prophet [now] dead made a compartment for himself in the water under the stone, so that it should always bleach his bones, because he feared burning by fire; and because they were worshipping the well taking it for a god.¹⁴⁰

Tírechán's Patrick proceeded to confront the druids by moving the stone and revealing that there were no bones under it but only water. This was one approach: the attempt to undermine the reverence paid to the well. An easier option, however, was to convert the pagan well into a Christian site. Úarán Garad, annexed to Céthech's church of Brí Garad, is a likely example. For this reason there were numerous wells associated with Christian saints throughout Ireland (and also Wales).

The final narrative set-piece in Tírechán's account of the Connachta comes, appropriately, in his native kingdom of Uí Amolngada.¹⁴¹ They were the rulers of what is now north-west Mayo, west of the River Moy. This seems to have been the land known to Tírechán as Mag nDomnon, including the later baronies of Tirawley (from Tír

¹³⁸ AU 747.14. Cf. below, pp. 561, 563, on *cánai* promulgated by Roscommon.

¹³⁹ Cerae was in what is now Co. Mayo, roughly from the River Robe to Castlebar, and including Balla (*Fél.*² Notes, 30 Mar.) and the village of Mayo (*Fél.*² Notes, 8 Dec.) itself. Tírechán's *sons Findmaige* apparently lay within the lands of Corcu Themne (*Collectanea*, 39); it is identified by K. W. Nicholls, 'Tobar Finnmuighe – Slán Pádraig', *Dinnseanchas*, 2 (1966–7), 97–8, with a ruined church in the townland of Ballynew, the parish of Aglish, barony of Carra, Co. Mayo, M 167 920.

¹⁴⁰ Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 39.

¹⁴¹ The name Amolngaid only occurs in the genitive in Tírechán, the form being Amolngid, but in *IT*² the name is treated as an *i*-stem, genitive Amolgada, Amalgodo or Amalgada.

nAmolngada, 'the Land of Amolngaid') and Erris (Irrus Domnann).¹⁴² Tírechán gives a central place to a grandson of Amolngaid, Conall mac Éndai maic Amolngada. The reason appears to be that Conall's descendants, among whom Tírechán counted himself, were believed to have been granted by his father, Éndae, to Patrick and 'some say that it is because of this that we have been servants of Patrick to the present day'.¹⁴³ According to Tírechán, Conall was the first of the Uí Amolngada to be baptised, his father, Éndae, postponing his own conversion because, as he said, very interestingly, 'I and my brothers cannot give our trust to you until we have got back to our own people, lest they should laugh at us.'¹⁴⁴ In Tírechán's work, 'the sons of Amolngaid' appear in two places. First, they were at Tara, in Book I, in order to bring a case of disputed inheritance before Lóegaire, as king of Tara; and, secondly, they appear in the final lengthy story in Book II, another account of Patrick triumphing over the druids as he had done in Mag mBreg and Mag nÁi.¹⁴⁵

Apart from Conall mac Éndai, the most important persons in Tírechán's story in Book I are Céthech of Brí Garad and Mucnoe of 'the Great Church by the Wood of Fochloth', the place called, in the Tripartite Life, Domnach Mór.¹⁴⁶ Tírechán makes Céthech and Mucnoe brothers, and thus both of the Uí Ailella. He also attaches them closely to Conall mac Éndai:

Conall, however, was baptised, and Patrick gave him a blessing and he held his hand and gave him to Bishop Céthech; and Céthech, and also Bishop Céthech's brother, Mucnoe, whose relics are in the Great Church of Patrick in the Wood of Fochloth, fostered him and taught him. For this reason Céthech entrusted his island to Conall, and it belongs to his [Conall's] kindred to the present day, because he was a layman after the death of the holy Céthech.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² For Irrus Domnann see *Lebor na Huidre*, ed. R. I. Best and O. J. Bergin (Dublin, 1929), I.1620; *Táin Bó Cúailnge, Recension I*, ed. and tr. C. O'Rahilly (Dublin, 1976), lines 2572–3. Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 42.6, shows that the area around the site where Patrick encountered the druids (near Cross Patrick, south-east of Killala) was part of Mag nDomnon (Tírechán's Domnon is an early form of standard OIr. Domnann). ¹⁴³ Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 15.2. ¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 14.5.

¹⁴⁵ Respectively *ibid.*, 14 and 42–4.

¹⁴⁶ VT² 1527. Tírechán has both 'aecessia magna Patricii in silua Fochlithi', *Collectanea*, c. 14.6, and 'aecessia super siluam Fochluth', c. 42.7, equivalent to some such Old Irish name as *Domnach Mór ar (i) Caill Fochlad*, 'the Great Domnach by (in) the Wood of Fochlad'.

¹⁴⁷ Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 14.6–7. Mac Neill, *Saint Patrick*, 2nd edn, p. 130, identified Céthech's island as Inishkea (off the Belmullet Peninsula), and he is followed by Swift, 'Background to the Treatment of the Connachta', p. 291. If this identification is correct, it provides weighty evidence that Céthech actually was an assistant of Patrick in the conversion of Mag nDomnonn (the latter being probable because of the name 'the Wood of Fochloth', the only Irish place-name in Patrick's *Confessio*: see below, p. 215).

Conversion was an opportunity to construct a web of artificial kinship, by baptism and by fosterage, connecting bishops from outside the kingdom to a branch of the dynasty.

Tírechán adds a further strand to this web when he says that, when Patrick ordained Mucnoe bishop, he gave him a copy of the first seven books of the Bible, the Heptateuch, known also as the Books of the Law.¹⁴⁸ These books were left by Mucnoe in his turn to Macc Ercae mac Maic Dregin, who, according to the Tripartite Life, was the patron saint of another church nearby, Cell Róe Móire.¹⁴⁹ Since early Irish canon law gave a high authority to Old Testament law, the significance of this transaction may be that Mucnoe was to hand on to Macc Ercae the knowledge necessary to be an ecclesiastical judge.¹⁵⁰

Macc Ercae, however, was the nexus of yet another link. According to Tírechán, when his father, Macc Dregin, came to request baptism for himself and for his seven sons, Patrick chose one of them, Macc Ercae, 'and blessed him with the blessing appropriate for a priest'. To this the father replied that he would be greatly distressed if his son were to go off with Patrick. He was contented, however, when Patrick said that he would hand him over to Brón mac Ichni and to Olcán. Brón was one of Patrick's most important Connaught bishops; his church, near Sligo Town, had the unusual privilege, which it jealously guarded throughout the Middle Ages and beyond, of possessing a corporeal relic of Patrick, in the shape of a tooth, the story of which is told by Tírechán.¹⁵¹ Olcán, the priest of Cell Óchtair Múaide, was a less important figure than Brón for Tírechán. His church was associated by the Tripartite Life with the Uí Fiachrach Múaide, the most powerful dynasty of northern Connaught; it may be because of this political connection that the Tripartite Life raised Olcán from the status of priest to that of a bishop.¹⁵² The effect of all these links of artificial kinship is shown in fig. 1.5.

The significance of Brón is illustrated by his appearance in some of the early Lives of Brigit as well as those of Patrick.¹⁵³ It is also demonstrated by his connections across Connaught and as far as Corcu Roíde, one of the western client-kingdoms of Mide, connections possibly aided by the border position of his church Caisel Irroí, lying between Uí

¹⁴⁸ Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 42.7.

¹⁴⁹ VT² 1609–12 (probably the townland of Kilroe at G 22 29).

¹⁵⁰ Cf. *Hib.* xix, xxi.1.

¹⁵¹ Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 45.4. Brón gave his name to the modern townland of Killaspugbrone (Cill Easpuig Bróin, 'the Church of Bishop Brón'), G 60 37, by Killaspug Point. For the later history see Killanin and Duignan, *Shell Guide to Ireland*, p. 428.

¹⁵² VT² 1567–78.

¹⁵³ *Vita Prima*, ed. Colgan and tr. Connolly, cc. 39, 85–6; *Bethu Brigte*, ed. Ó hAodha, c. 40.

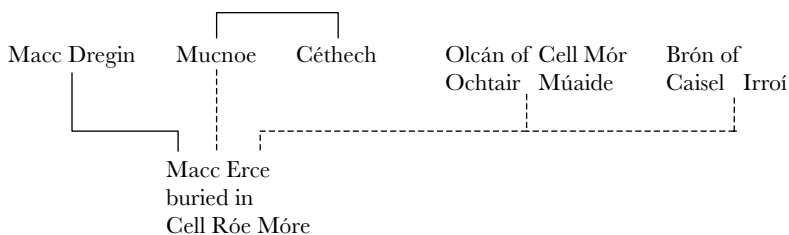


Fig. 1.5. Uí Amolngada and Uí Fiachrach Múaide/Muirisce

Fíachrach Muirisce and Cenél Coirpri Dromma Clíab, with the Uí Ailella not far away to the south-east (fig. 1.6).¹⁵⁴

No doubt many such links of saintly kinship were not just artificial but also fictitious; but it would not have been important to make such claims if the consequences had been negligible. Local churches were sometimes threatened with subjection and loss of both lands and status: alliances may have strengthened their position.

The Tripartite Life's account of the Uí Amolngada differs from that of Tírechán, on which it drew, by making a different church the centre of its attention and by recognising the existence of another church, Cell Alaid, which was to become, in the twelfth century, the episcopal church of both the kingdom of Uí Amolngada and that of the Uí Fiachrach Múaide. All these churches of the Uí Amolngada – Domnach Mór, Cross Pátraic, Cell Alaid and Cell Róe Móre – lay within a mile or two of each other (see Map 5).¹⁵⁵ What the Tripartite Life shows, when compared with Tírechán, is that Domnach Mór, which seems to have been the early episcopal church, was superseded by Cell Alaid. Domnach Mór is mentioned merely as the place where Mucnoe's body rested, whereas Patrick is said to have founded Cell Alaid and to have left there 'a high-ranking person of his household, that is Bishop Muiredach'.¹⁵⁶ The ninth-century and later martyrologies did not include the saint of Domnach Mór, whereas the notes to the *Féilire Óengusso* have Muiredach of Cell Alaid under 12 August.¹⁵⁷ The source of the Tripartite Life's

¹⁵⁴ The bishops of Tamnach: Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 25. Macc Ríme of Corcu Roíde: *ibid.*, 45. VT² 1601–2. Maine of Echaineach: Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 19.5; 46.1; cf. *Notulae*, no. 3 (ed. Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, p. 180), referring to the story in VT² 1664–75.

¹⁵⁵ Domnach Mór, G 22 28; Cross Pátraic, cf. Crospatrick Ho. G 23 28; Cell Alaid, G 20 30; Cell Róe Móre, G 21 29. ¹⁵⁶ VT² 1535–6; cf. 1527.

¹⁵⁷ Similarly *The Martyrology of Gorman*, ed. and tr. W. Stokes, Henry Bradshaw Society, 9 (London, 1895), and *The Martyrology of Donegal*, ed. and tr. J. O' Donovan, J. H. Todd and W. Reeves, Irish Archaeological and Celtic Society (Dublin, 1864), both under 12 August.

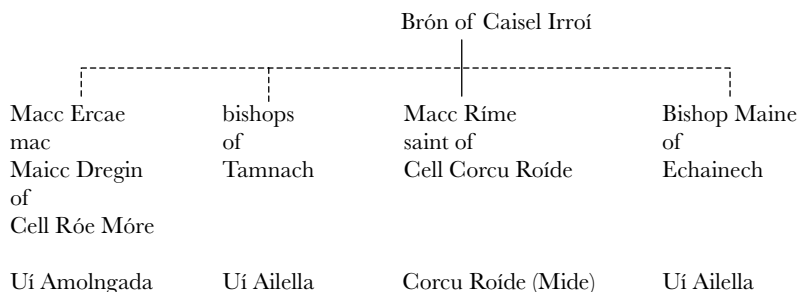


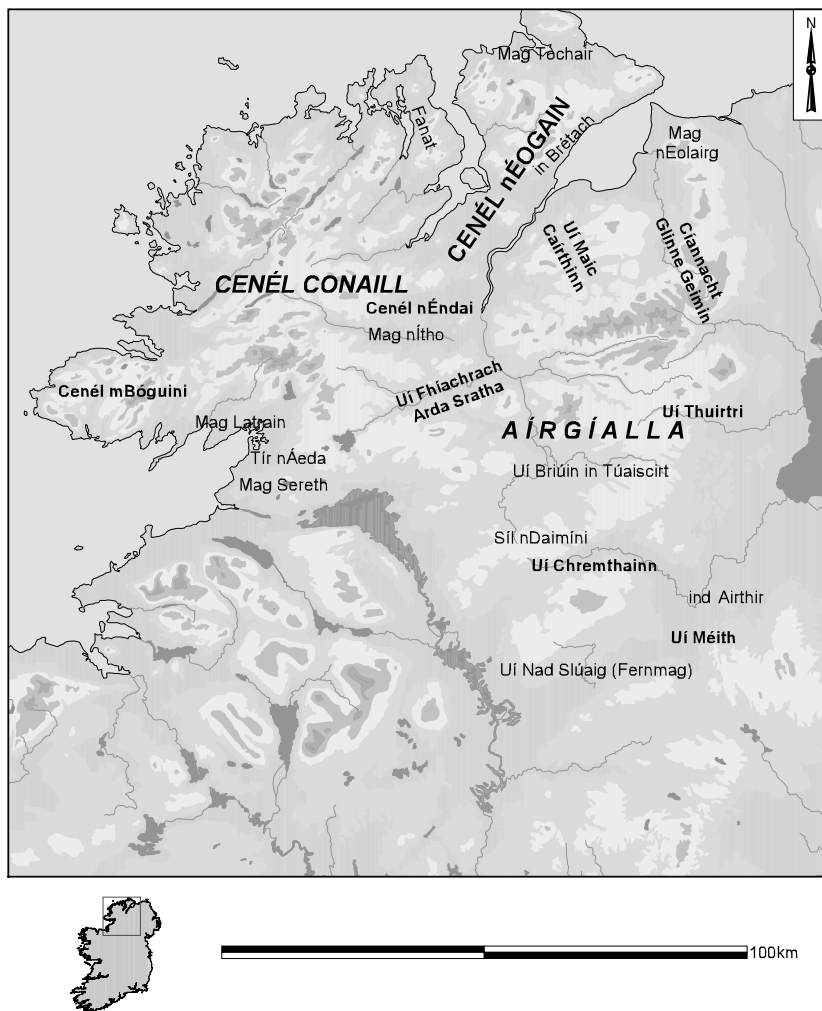
Fig. 1.6. Brón of Caisel Irroi

account, however, appears to have been an adherent neither of Cell Alaid nor of Domnach Mór but of Cross Pátraic. The whole narrative concentrates on the confrontation with the druids and sees it from the standpoint of Cross Pátraic. The minute topographical detail indicates that the source must have been familiar with the sites, and was probably a native, like Tírechán, of Tír nAmolngada. Tírechán gave relatively little attention to the rest of Connaught, namely, for him, the lands along the north-west coast of Ireland from the Moy to the Foyle. These were kingdoms in which the cult of Columba, a native of the strongest of them, Cenél Conaill, was powerful. What is striking about this section of Patrick's circuit is the complete absence of any mention of Cenél nÉogain. The latter was to be, from the middle of the eighth century, the Uí Néill dynasty closest allied with Armagh. Its status is evident from the Tripartite Life's account of the case brought by the sons of Amolngaid to Lóegaire, king of Tara, for judgement.¹⁵⁸ Éndae and his son Conall were in danger of being kept out of Tara by the door-keepers, for their opponent, Éndae's brother Óengus, had been Lóegaire's foster-son, was therefore well known in Tara and was able to induce the door-keepers to do his will. To trump this dishonest trick, Patrick instructed Conall, whom Óengus feared because of his skill in pleading a case, to seek out 'my faithful friend, Éogan mac Néill', and to use the secret sign employed between Patrick and Éogan.¹⁵⁹ When, therefore, Patrick crosses the Barnesmore Pass into the Foyle basin, in the Tripartite Life he soon meets Éogan and his sons and gives them his full blessing. The effusiveness of the Tripartite Life about 'Patrick's faithful friend' contrasts with the utter silence of Tírechán. As we shall see later, this change of attitude is explained by political changes in the 730s.¹⁶⁰

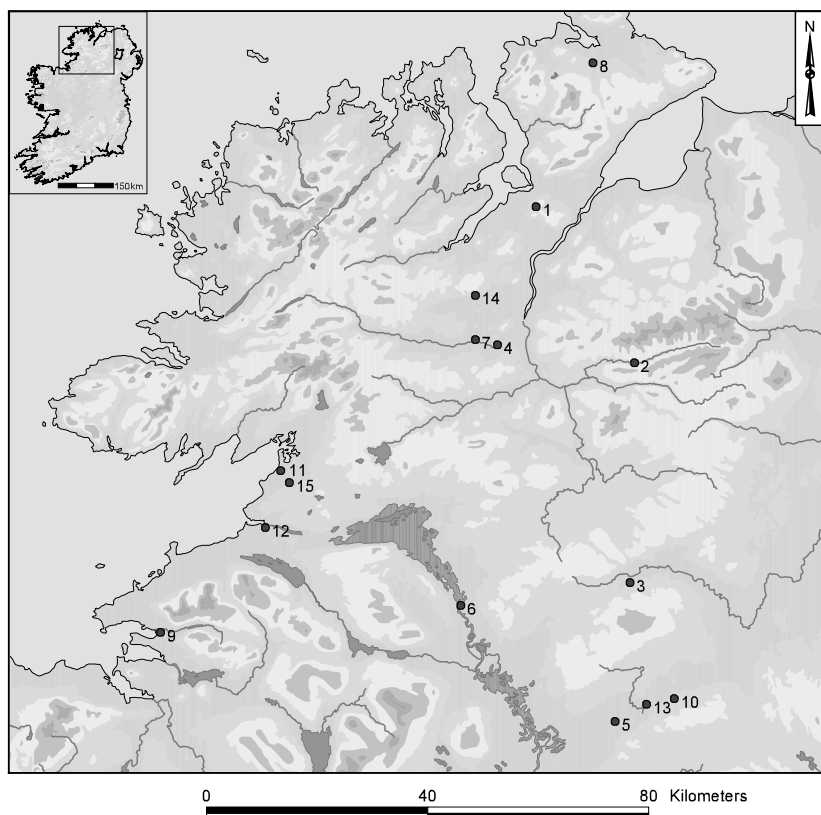
¹⁵⁸ VT² 1460–87.

¹⁵⁹ VT² 1478–81.

¹⁶⁰ See below, pp. 572–4.



Map 6. The north-west (a) Peoples and places



- | | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| 1. Ailech | 9. Druim Clíab / Drumcliff |
| 2. Bothdomnach / Bodoney | 10. Druim Snechtai / Drumsnat |
| 3. Clochar Macc nDaiméni / Clogher | 11. Druim Túamma / Dromhome |
| 4. Cloítech / Clady | 12. Ess Rúaid / Assaroe |
| 5. Clúain Éois / Clones | 13. Loch nUaithe / Lough Ooney |
| 6. Daiminis | 14. Ráith Bó / Raphoe |
| 7. Domnach Mór Maige Ítha | 15. Ráith Chungai / Racoo(n) |
| 8. Domnach Mór Maige Tochair / Donagh, Carndonagh | |

Map 6 (*cont.*). The north-west (b) Sites

The Tripartite Life and Tírechán's *Collectanea* can similarly be used in harness to reveal in part the development of politics in the province of Ulster – a province that by the late seventh century was confined to the east of the River Bann.

(III) THE NORTH-EAST¹⁶¹

In the province of Ulster *c.* 700 there were three main political groupings. The Dál Fiatach of east Co. Down were generally recognised as the Ulaid (Ulstermen) proper and thus as the natural rulers of the province. They faced, however, a serious rival in the Cruithni, a string of peoples from the plain of Eilne in the north, between the Bann and the Bush, to the Uí Echach of Mag Cobo in west Co. Down. The Cruithni provided several kings of the province of Ulster in the pre-Viking period, and even went on to trumpet claims to be 'the true Ulaid', the heirs of Conchobor mac Nessa and Cú Chulainn. The third, and weakest, power was Dál Riata in the far north-east, from the River Bush eastwards. Its main territories were by then across the North Channel, in what is now Argyll. Dál Riata were closer to being overlords of northern Britain, north of the Forth and Clyde estuaries, than they were to dominating the province of Ulster.

One thing that the comparison of Tírechán's *Collectanea* and the Tripartite Life shows is that the Dál Riata in Ulster were under strong military pressure in the late seventh and early eighth centuries. It also shows, however, that the Cruithni were being reshaped as a much more unified kingdom, increasingly known as Dál nAraidi after the most successful of its constituent groups. Dál nAraidi's base was the kingdom of Mag Line in the valley of the Six Mile Water, running down to Lough Neagh by the town of Antrim, to the north-west of Belfast; its rulers were usually known by their dynastic name as Uí Chóelbad. They were devoting much of their time to extending their power northwards, both against other Cruithnian kingdoms and against Dál Riata. This was a long process, beginning probably in the sixth century, after the Cruithni had lost territory to the west of the River Bann.¹⁶² So far as the Cruithni were concerned, it was largely complete by the middle of the seventh

¹⁶¹ B. B. Williams, 'Early Christian Landscapes in County Antrim', in T. Reeves-Smyth and F. Hamond (eds.), *Landscape Archaeology in Ireland*, BAR, British Series, 116 (Oxford, 1983), 233–46, discusses types of field-systems associated with raths (ring-forts) and upland settlements. F. McCormick, 'Farming and Food in Medieval Lecale', in L. Proudfoot (ed.), *Down: History and Society. Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County* (Dublin, 1997), pp. 33–46, covers most of the heartland of the early medieval Ulaid, arguing for the relative importance of tillage in the area.

¹⁶² Partly as a result of the battle of Móin Daire Lóthair, AU 563.1.

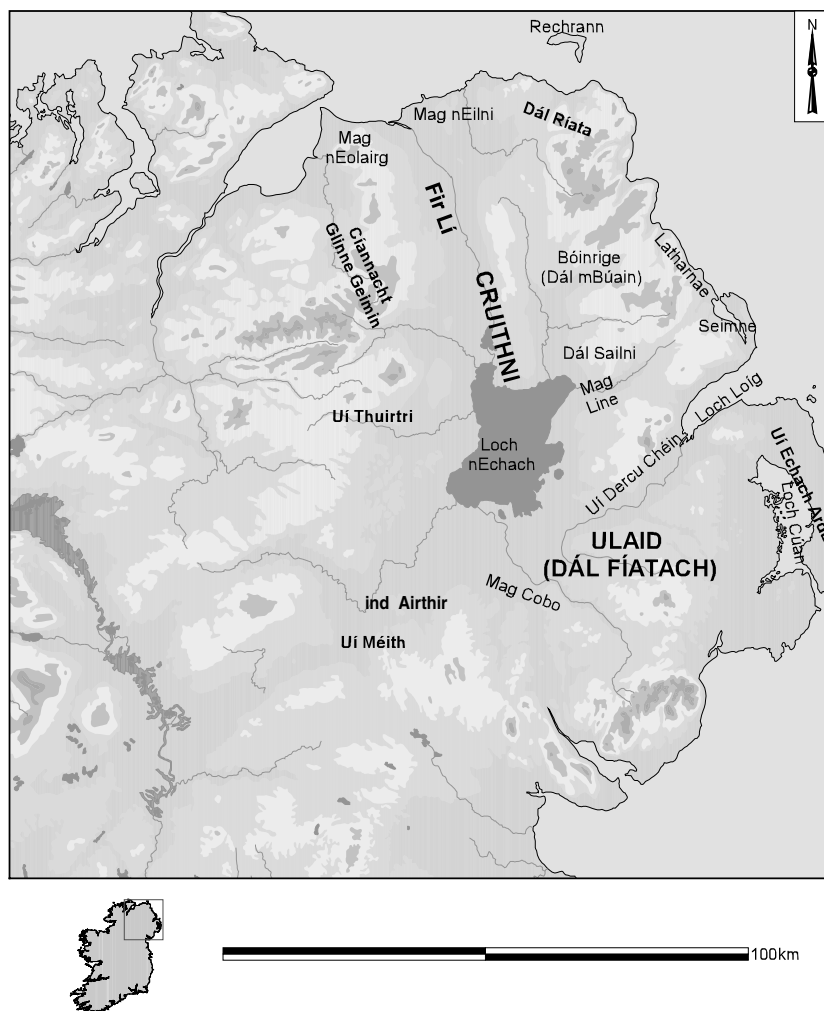
century, but Dál nAraidí (ruled by the Uí Chóelbad) then went on to attack Dál Riata. Because of this political background, Tírechán's Patrick had a problem in Ulster not unlike his difficulties in Connaught. Dál nAraidí were closely identified with the church of Connor, just to the north of their main territory. This alliance between dynasty and church effectively excluded the Patrician *familia* from enjoying any far-reaching influence on Dál nAraidí and its client-peoples. Again, therefore, the alliances of Patrick were mainly with declining kingdoms and thus declining churches. On the other hand, the Cruithni offer a striking exception to the normal rule that political and ecclesiastical decline went hand in hand. The church of Connor, although closely allied with Dál nAraidí, was not their church; instead it belonged to their neighbours to the north, Dál Sailní.

In Adomnán's Life of Columba, there is a revealing story about a visit made by the saint to Coleraine.¹⁶³ Columba was returning along the northern coast of Ireland from a conference between the Cenél Conaill king, Áed mac Ainmirech, and Áedán mac Gabráin, king of Dál Riata. When he came to Coleraine, the northernmost among the principal churches of the Cruithni, he was received by Conall, described as bishop of Coleraine. Conall had collected from the people of Mag nEilni 'almost innumerable gifts' which were laid out in the enclosure of the monastery for Columba to bless. For Adomnán, the crucial element in the story was Columba's ability to perceive the spirit in which each gift was given; but what is more valuable for us are some of the things which Adomnán took for granted. The plain of Eilne was a small kingdom of the type ruled by a king of a *túath*, 'people', a *rí túaithe*. That it also had a bishop illustrates the principle that ecclesiastical units of pastoral care and government corresponded to secular units. The gifts collected from the people of Mag nEilni are evidently those described in the Bishops' Synod as being given to the bishop.¹⁶⁴ They may have been displayed in front of Columba, but they were collected by, and apparently for, the bishop.¹⁶⁵ Yet, although the bishop had authority over Eilne, he was bishop of Coleraine. Bishops were often known simply as Bishop

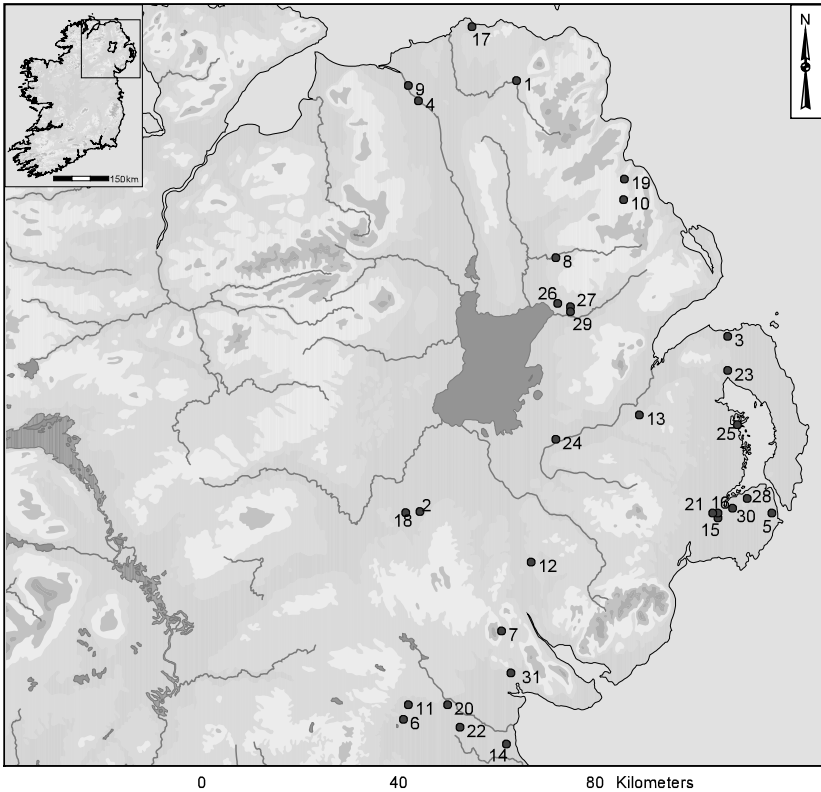
¹⁶³ Adomnán, *VSC* i.50.

¹⁶⁴ *Synodus Episcoporum*, c. 25, ed. and tr. L. Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae*, 5 (Dublin, 1963), pp. 58, 59 (not repeated in the *Hibernensis*).

¹⁶⁵ Contrast the situation described in the eighth-century Life of Mo Lua of Clonfertmulloe. He was of the Corcu Óche, a client people of the Uí Fidgente of Co. Limerick; yet Clonfertmulloe lay on the south side of Slieve Bloom, within the Leinster kingdom of Loigsi but close to the frontier with Osraige. His monastery, therefore, was many miles from Corcu Óche territory. Yet, because he belonged to that people and had founded a church, he could collect gifts from the Corcu Óche: *Vita Prior S. Lugidi*, c. 35, ed. Heist, *Vitae*, p. 138. This is probably the custom mentioned by Bede in his account of Inishboffin, *HE* iv.4.



Map 7. The north-east (a) Peoples and places



- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Airther Maige / Armoy | 16. Dún Lethglaise / Downpatrick: The Mount |
| 2. Ard Macha / Armagh | 17. Dún Sobuirgi (Sobairche) / Dunseverick |
| 3. Bennchor / Bangor | 18. Emain Macha / Navan Fort |
| 4. Cambus / Camus | 19. Glúaire / Glere |
| 5. Cell Chleithe / Kilcief | 20. Inis Cain Dega / Inishkeen |
| 6. Cell Roiss / Carrickmacross | 21. Inis Causcraid / Inch |
| 7. Cell Shléibe / Killeavy | 22. Lugmad / Louth |
| 8. Coindiri / Connor | 23. Mag mBili / Movilla |
| 9. Cúl Raithin / Coleraine | 24. Mag Roth / Mag Rath, Moira |
| 10. [Deer Park Farms, Glenarm] | 25. Nándruim / Nendrum |
| 11. Domnach Maigen / Donaghmoynne | 26. Oentrab / Antrim |
| 12. Domnach Mór Maige Coba / Donaghmore | 27. Ráith Becc / Rathbeg |
| 13. Druimm Bó / Drumbo | 28. Ráith Cholpthai / Raholp |
| 14. Druim Inasclainn / Dromiskinn | 29. Ráith Mór Maige Line / Rathmore |
| 15. Dún Lethglaise / Downpatrick Cath. | 30. Saball Pátraic / Saul |
| | 31. Fochart / Faughart |

Map 7 (cont.). The north-east (b) Sites

So-and-so, but if a place was attached to the title it was nearly always a particular church, not a kingdom.

The subsequent ecclesiastical situation in Eilne is revealed by Tírechán in the late seventh century and then by the Notes in the Book of Armagh, to which the narrative in the Tripartite Life corresponds closely. Tírechán's Patrick came along much the same route as that taken by Columba, eastwards across the Bann close to its mouth, 'and he blessed the *locus* in which is the church of Cúl Raithin in Eilne where there has been a bishop and he constructed many other churches in Eilne'.¹⁶⁶ Tírechán's Patrick then crossed the Bush into the kingdom of Dál Riata and proceeded to the royal fortress of Dún Sebuirge (Dunseverick), where he consecrated Olcán as bishop. He had fostered Olcán himself, and he now went on to give him a portion of the relics of St Peter and St Paul preserved in Armagh. The only other church said to have received a portion of these relics was Baislec, an episcopal church in the kingdom of Cíarraige nAí.¹⁶⁷ Baislec had earlier occupied a central place in Armagh's ambitions for Connaught but had very recently fallen a victim to Uí Briúin expansion. This passage in Tírechán on the gift of relics thus conferred high status on Olcán's church at Airther Maige (Armoyle, Co. Antrim).

The position of Coleraine was not happy. Tírechán describes it as a small church in which there had been a bishop.¹⁶⁸ What had happened to it since it was visited by Columba is shown a little later by Tírechán, when he says that Patrick founded 'many churches which the people of the church of Connor possess'.¹⁶⁹ Connor lay further south; by 640 it may already have been the most important church among the Cruithni, since its bishop seems to have participated in the enquiry of the leading northern ecclesiastics to which the letter of the pope-elect John was an

¹⁶⁶ Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 48.2.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.2, where the church is described as *Basilica Sanctorum*. See above, pp. 44–5, and Doherty, 'The Cult of St Patrick', p. 79.

¹⁶⁸ Tírechán's *cellola*, 'small church' (for him a most unusual term), is perhaps rendered by *recllés* in VT² 1939, since *recllés* is elsewhere in VT² glossed 'that is, the little church', VT² 970. Yet there is also the possibility that Tírechán's vocabulary here reflects some written source: in the same passage he has Patrick found *alias cellas multas*, but a few lines later on, after a visit to Dál Riata, Patrick returns across the Bush and finds *multas aeclesias*. In both cases the 'many churches' are in Eilne, and *aeclesia* is Tírechán's regular term. Bieler suggested reading *fiit* in place of *fuit* in the clause 'in Eilniu, in quo fuit episcopus', comparing c. 37.1, 'du Achud Fobair, in quo fiunt episcopi', where *fiunt* corresponds to the OIr. consuetudinal present of the substantive verb, *bíait*. The historical evidence suggests that no such emendation is correct. The important saint who had been in Coleraine was its patron saint, Coirpre, *Fél*.², Notes, 11 Nov.

¹⁶⁹ Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 48.3 ('Connor' derives from the name of the people known as Coindiri, a plural name, presumably those on whose land the church was built).

answer.¹⁷⁰ Like Coleraine, it was an episcopal church. Its founding saint was Mac Nisse, said in the Tripartite Life to have been a disciple of Olcán, bishop of Armoy.¹⁷¹ A plausible context for the demotion of Coleraine to inferior, ex-episcopal status is the conquest of Eilne in the middle of the seventh century by the kings of Mag Line in the valley of the Antrim Water.¹⁷² One branch of the royal dynasty of Mag Line appears to have migrated north to Eilne.¹⁷³ It retained control, however, of an old church in Mag Line, their homeland, namely Domnach Combair (probably Muckamore).¹⁷⁴ For this reason, it may have been content to see Coleraine lose its episcopal status.

The Tripartite Life tells a very similar story about Armoy, the principal church of Dál Riata. Tírechán does not mention Armoy itself, but rather has Patrick consecrate Olcán at the royal fortress at Dunseverick.¹⁷⁵ The reason for this choice was perhaps that he could thereby make an association between the *petra Patricii*, 'rock of Patrick', at Dunseverick and the share of Armagh's precious relics of Peter and Paul given to Olcán.¹⁷⁶ Tírechán's Patrick was favouring not only Olcán and Armoy, but also the kings of Dál Riata. The Tripartite Life describes Armoy as the 'noble see of Dál Riata', but then, a little later, tells a story to explain why Armoy had not remained a major church.¹⁷⁷ Among the Dál nAraidi, neighbours of Dál Riata, Patrick cursed one brother from the ruling dynasty and blessed another, with the usual result that the cursed brother's descendants lost the kingship and the blessed brother's descendants gained it. The cursed brother, however, Sárán mac Coílbaid, subsequently led a raiding party into the kingdom of Dál Riata and hauled some of its inhabitants off into captivity. As Sárán and his men were making for home, they happened to meet Bishop Olcán, who asked Sárán to release his captives. He declared that he would only comply with Olcán's request if the latter gave him entry into heaven in exchange. To this Olcán replied that he could not go against Patrick.

¹⁷⁰ Bede, *HE* ii.19.

¹⁷¹ *VT*² 1933–4. Olcán is presumably identical with the Bolcanus of the Life of Mac Nisse, c. 1, ed. Heist, *Vitae*, p. 404. ¹⁷² *Bechbretha*, ed. Charles-Edwards and Kelly, p. 126.

¹⁷³ Cf. AU 824.7: Dál nAraidi in Tuaiscirt.

¹⁷⁴ *Notulae*, no. 17; Mac Neill, *Saint Patrick*, 2nd edn, p. 209; cf. W. Reeves, *Ecclesiastical Antiquities of Down, Connor and Dromore* (Dublin, 1847), pp. 97–8.

¹⁷⁵ Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 48.3 (Armoy is D 07 33, Dunseverick c 98 44).

¹⁷⁶ Compare the *petra Patricii* at Dún Sobuirgi with the *petra Coithrigi* at Uisnech (Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 16.4), and with the *petra Coithrigi* at Cashel, *Collectanea*, 51.4. The comparison suggests not only that Coithrige was indeed an old name for Patrick (contrary to A. Harvey, 'The Significance of *Coithrige*', *Ériu*, 36 1985, 1–9), but that Dún Sobuirgi was, or had been, regarded as a very important royal site. ¹⁷⁷ *VT*² 1878–9, 1916–36.

Sárán then played his trump card by threatening to kill his captives there and then if Olcán did not bow to his demand. This Olcán proceeded to do, but then – unhappy man – he had to travel south to make his peace with Patrick. He met him on his way, whereupon Patrick told his charioteer to drive over Olcán. The charioteer very properly refused, but Patrick declared that Armoy would not be an exalted foundation and would be plundered by Scandal and Cú Chúarán, kings of Dál nAraidi (*ob.* 646 and 708). Armoy's land would pass to Mac Nisse, the founder of Connor in Dál nAraidi, and to Senán, the saint of Scattery Island in the estuary of the Shannon.¹⁷⁸ As we shall see later, the reference to Senán of Scattery Island is an error for Senán of Lathrach Briúin. The general point is, however, unaffected by this error (indeed, the mistake shows that the story is older than the Tripartite Life): Armoy suffered along with the kingdom of which it was the episcopal church; military defeat in the seventh century led directly to the decline of the church and the transfer of many of its lands to major churches outside Dál Riata.

Both Armoy and Coleraine exhibit the effects of military expansion by the Uí Chóelbad of Mag Line and associated ecclesiastical aggrandisement. What happened, apparently, was that the power of the Uí Chóelbad within the province of Ulster increased markedly in the middle of the seventh century. This followed the defeat and death of Congal Cáech in the battle of Mag Rath in 637, Congal probably being from another dynasty among the Cruithni.¹⁷⁹ It may seem odd that Dál Riata should be one of the principal political victims of the Uí Chóelbad in the years after 637, when the Cruithnian king of Tara, Congal Cáech, had been defeated and killed in the battle. Yet Domnall Brecc, king of Dál Riata, was an ally of Congal Cáech. The dynasties defeated at Mag Roth and the associated battle of Saitir, both the dynasty to which Congal Cáech belonged and the Cenél nGabraín, current rulers of Dál Riata, were perhaps rivals or enemies of the Uí Chóelbad. Whatever the background, that Dál Riata indeed suffered in these years is confirmed by the evidence of Cumméne the White writing only a single generation later:¹⁸⁰

This prophecy has been fulfilled in our times, in the battle of Roth, when Domnall Brecc, Aidán's grandson, without cause harried the province of

¹⁷⁸ According to the Irish Life of Senán, ed. W. Stokes, *Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore*, Anecdota Oxoniensia (Oxford, 1890), pp. 54–5, tr. pp. 201–2, he was of the Corcu Baiscinn of south-west Clare, in other words the adjacent kingdom to Inis Cathaig.

¹⁷⁹ *Bechbretha*, ed. Charles-Edwards and Kelly, pp. 123–6. On the significance of the battle see below, pp. 494–9. ¹⁸⁰ Adomnán, *VSC* iii.5.

Domnall grandson of Ainmuire. And from that day to this their power has been in course of reduction at the hands of external enemies.

These external enemies may have included others apart from Uí Chóelbad, such as the Strathclyde Britons who killed Domnall Brecc at the battle of Strathcarron in 642;¹⁸¹ but, for the Irish mainland section of Dál Riata, Uí Chóelbad were the main enemies.

The ecclesiastical aggression of Uí Chóelbad probably began before the middle of the seventh century. The first founder of Connor is said to have been Mac Nisse, but there was also, according to one version of the Life, a second *patronus*, Colmán Elo, the founder of Lynally in the midlands.¹⁸² Reeves noticed the connection between Colmán Elo and Connor and cited a passage in the Life of Mac Nisse which claimed that the two saints were of the same kindred.¹⁸³ Charles Doherty has recently reverted to this same connection and has pointed out that Colmán was of a *gens* called Dál Sailni, and that Dál Sailni was a neighbour of the Uí Chóelbad of Dál nAraidi, lying between them and the Dál mBúain to which Patrick's druidical master belonged.¹⁸⁴ The genealogies of Dál nAraidi regard both Dál Sailni and Dál mBúain as 'base-client peoples', *aithechthúatha* (see chapter 2), and as genealogically related.¹⁸⁵ There is a further connection of the same genealogical kind with the church of Lathrach Briúin, Laraghbryan, just to the west of Maynooth and thus not far from the old *domnach* church of the area, Domnach Mór Maige Lúadat: Laraghbryan's patron saint, Senán, was also of Dál Sailni.¹⁸⁶ In both cases, the links with Connor are demonstrated by annalistic obits for men who had been heads of Connor and Lynally, or Connor, Lynally and Laraghbryan:¹⁸⁷ a linked headship of churches found its justification in the genealogies on the grounds that the founding saints were of the same *gens*. It appears, therefore, that Connor was originally the church of Dál Sailni, just as, for example, Ardbraccan was originally the episcopal church of Dál Conchobuir, the *gens* to which Ultán, its bishop in

¹⁸¹ AU 642.1. ¹⁸² *Vita Colmani Elo*, c. 3, ed. Plummer, *Vitae*, i.254.

¹⁸³ Reeves, *Ecclesiastical Antiquities of Down, Connor and Dromore*, pp. 97–8, 240–1. Cf. *Vita S. Macnissae*, c. 14, ed. Heist, *Vitae*, p. 406; *CGSH* 564. ¹⁸⁴ Doherty, 'The Cult of St Patrick', pp. 89–90.

¹⁸⁵ *The Book of Lecan: A Facsimile*, ed. K. Mulchrone, Irish Manuscripts Commission, Facsimiles in Collotype of Irish Manuscripts, 2 (Dublin, 1937), fos. (of facsimile) 125'b45–126'a18.

¹⁸⁶ Laraghbryan is at N 923 377, Domnach Mór Maige Lúadat at N 963 372; the pedigree of Senán of Lathrach Briúin is at *CGSH* 299.

¹⁸⁷ AU 778: obit of Ainfchellach, abbot of Connor and Lynally; AU 867.2 (the italicised portion is only in ACLon and in The Annals of the Four Masters (*Annála Ríoghachta Éireann*, ed. and tr. J. O'Donovan, Dublin, 1851), s.a. 865, and in an interlinear addition by the main hand in AU): Óged-char abbot of Connor and Lynally. AU 901.2: Tipraite son of Nuadu, *airchinnech* of Connor and of other churches, that is, of Lynally and Laraghbryan, [died].

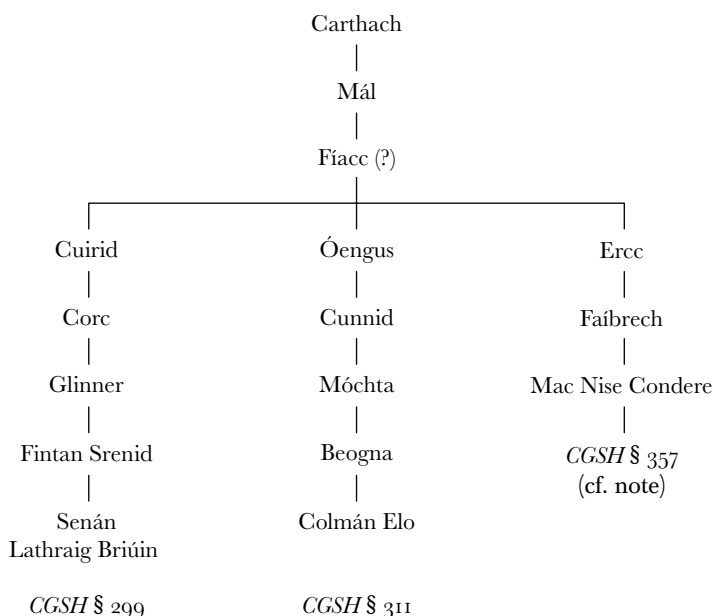


Fig. 1.7. Dál Sailni

the middle of the seventh century, belonged.¹⁸⁸ As the political independence of Dál Sailni came to an end, so also, as an element in the same process, the church of Connor, although still held by Dál Sailni, became an instrument of the drive by the Uí Chóelbad to subject the kingdoms to the north. The situation is paralleled by the church of Lusk in the eighth century: the kindred which controlled the church was a formerly royal dynasty of the Cíannachta (fig. 1.7).¹⁸⁹

Evidence for the continuing importance of Dál Sailni may be seen in the Life of Columba by Adomnán. In one of his two references to Colmán Elo the saint is described as ‘bishop, member of Dál Sailni’, *episcopus mocu Sailni*, just as another Colmán is *episcopus mocu Loígse*,¹⁹⁰ but in the other reference Colmán moccu Sailni is a priest, *presbyter*, like

¹⁸⁸ Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 1: ‘apud Ultanum episcopum Conchuburnensium’ (Bieler’s translation here and in Muirchú, Prol. [B], ‘Connor’, is a slip); 18.1: ‘ab illo Ultano episcopo Conchuburnensi’; cf. *VT*² 636–7, 3058–9; *CGSH* 722.4; AU 657.1; *Martyrology of Tallaght*, ed. and tr. R. I. Best and H. J. Lawlor, Henry Bradshaw Society, 68 (London, 1931), 4 September.

¹⁸⁹ *CGH* i.168–9 (145 c 14); AU 702.4; 736.3; 784.2; 787.1; K. Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society* (London, 1966), p. 162. ¹⁹⁰ Adomnán, *VSC* i.5, iii.12.

Báithéne, abbot of Iona.¹⁹¹ Colmán's episcopal status and the link between that status and his membership of the *gens* of Dál Sailni may even have suggested that the kingdom of which Dál Sailni was the *gens* was free, a *sóerthúath*; but later it became an *aithechthúath*, a base-client people, as a result of the growing power of the Uí Chóelbad of Mag Line. The alternative perception of Colmán as of merely priestly status might be thought to accord more easily with this later depressed status of the kingdom from which he came. And yet the relationship between Dál Sailni and Dál nAraidí evidently involved a settlement by which, while the Uí Chóelbad of Dál nAraidí supplied the principal kings, Dál Sailni had the principal church. Since the status of bishop was equated with that of king, both *gentes* continued to have their high status sustained by their hold over an exalted office, political in the one case, ecclesiastical in the other.¹⁹²

The linked headships of Connor, Lynally and Laraghbryan, however, suggest that as late as the beginning of the tenth century, underneath the overlordship of Uí Chóelbad, both Dál Sailni and Dál mBúain retained a sense of their separate political identity, much as, in Northumbria, the former kingdom of Deira retained its identity under the power of the Bernician kings. In both cases the symbol of that identity was transferred from royal lineage to a great church: the Whitby Life of Gregory the Great illustrates the point for Deira. And just as Whitby became the burial place of Edwin, his daughter Eanfled and her daughter Ælfled, so Connor was the reputed burial place of the body, minus the head, of the southern Uí Néill ruler, Diarmait mac Cerbaill, king of Ireland according to Adomnán, treacherously done to death in Ráith Becc in the neighbouring Mag Line by a king of the Dál nAraidí, Áed the Black.¹⁹³ In the post-Viking period the church of Connor and the lands of Dál Sailni and Dál mBúain were taken from Dál nAraidí by their neighbours to the west, on the other side of Lough Neagh, Uí Thuirtri.¹⁹⁴ Mag Line remained to Dál nAraidí, but the *aithechthúatha* were taken from them,

¹⁹¹ Ibid., ii.15.

¹⁹² *CIH* 588, 2269.35–9, 2282.25; *Críth Gablach*, ed. D. A. Binchy, Medieval and Modern Irish Series (Dublin, 1941), lines 598–606.

¹⁹³ AT and CS both expand the entry as found in AU; the reference to the head being brought to Clonmacnois suggests that this expansion took place in the Clonmacnois Chronicle of the tenth century which lies behind AT and CS. To judge by *Hib.* xlix.10, a reference I owe to Mrs E. O'Brien, the church with the head took precedence: that is, Clonmacnois had precedence over Connor. Cf. Adomnán, *VSC* i.36.

¹⁹⁴ Mac Neill, *Saint Patrick*, 2nd edn, pp. 209–10; Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, pp. 125–6; cf. AU 1016. 4.

and with them the church of Connor.¹⁹⁵ This may explain the continued remembrance of the Dál Sailni and the Dál mBuain, for example in the Middle Irish tale of *Aided Echach maic Maireda maic Cairedo*.¹⁹⁶ The story begins with a variant of the Diarmait and Gráinne story, according to which a young woman intended to be the consort of an old man herself chooses a younger mate. This explains why Eochu had to flee from his father, Mairid, taking with him his father's wife Eibliu, after she had put an *alges* upon him (an *alges* being a demand which he could not avoid complying with if he was to retain his honour). Eochu contested the joint kingship of Ulster, but his companion failed to shut up a remarkable well. Eochu was drowned by the flood that came from the well, Lough Neagh came into being, and all his offspring perished except for Conaing, 'from whom derived Dál mBúain and Dál Sailni'.¹⁹⁷ This tale is a pleasing combination of 'place-name learning', *dindsenchas*, an origin-legend explaining why the ancestor of two *gentes* of royal descent was compelled to emigrate from Munster to the North-East, and a tale of elopement by a woman from the *síd* (fairy mound) and a king's son.¹⁹⁸ It is plainly favourable to the status of Dál Sailni and Dál mBúain: the motif of migration by the ancestor is precisely that found, for example, in the genealogies of Dál Riata.¹⁹⁹

The association of Connor, Lynally and Laraghbryan suggests a background to the role of Dál mBúain in the Patrician legend. The story was that Patrick had been a slave to a king, or druid, or both king and druid, of Dál mBúain, Miliucc maccu Búain. It further claims that the prayers Patrick uttered as he herded the livestock of his master were said on the slopes of Slíab Mis, Slemish in Co. Antrim. As we shall see later, it is as certain as almost anything can be in the career of Patrick that he was a slave in what is now Co. Mayo, in the lands to the west of the River Moy. The Dál mBúain and Slemish version of the story of Patrick's time as a slave is, therefore, a fiction. The problem then becomes one of deciding when, where and why this fiction was invented. First, as for the question of date, it is likely that the story was already well established by the second half of the seventh century. Tírechán, who was himself, as

¹⁹⁵ Mag Line was the later deanery of Maulyne (Reeves, *Ecclesiastical Antiquities*, p. 62), whereas Connor lay within the deanery of Turtrye (< Uí Thuirtri) (pp. 82, 84).

¹⁹⁶ *Lebor na hUidre*, ed. Best and Bergin, pp. 95–100 (the tale was written into *Lebor na hUidre* by the later scribe H). ¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, lines 2959–60.

¹⁹⁸ On the genre, see B. Ó Cuív, 'Dinnsenchas – The Literary Exploitation of Irish Place-Names', *Ainm*, 4 (1989–90), 90–106.

¹⁹⁹ T. F. O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology* (Dublin, 1946), pp. 81–2.

we have seen, a native of the kingdom in which Patrick was a slave, plainly accepted the Dál mBúain and Slemish version, as, less surprisingly, did Muirchú.²⁰⁰ Secondly, the story presupposed that the political decline of Dál mBúain had already occurred, since one of its functions was to explain that decline. Dál mBúain is likely, for geographical reasons, to have become a subject kingdom, or former kingdom, before the Uí Chóelbad conquered Eilne in the middle of the seventh century. A possible date for the story is, therefore, in the first half of the seventh century, after the expansion of Uí Chóelbad had got under way.

The answers to the questions of where and why the Dál mBúain version of the story was composed hang together. As it occurs in Muirchú it involves a contrast between Dál Fiatach, the ruling *gens* of the Ulaid, in east Co. Down, with their royal seat at Downpatrick, and Dál mBúain. Attached to this contrast is a further one, between Díchu mac Trichim, 'a man who was by nature good, even though a pagan',²⁰¹ and Míliucc maccu Búain, the king who killed himself rather than submit to the preaching of his former slave. The descendants of Díchu, however, were the principal ecclesiastical family of Saul and subsequently of Downpatrick: the story of Patrick's burial at Saul, on Díchu's land, gave them a claim to the church as 'the kindred of the land', namely the kindred which owned the land on which a church was built.²⁰² This claim to provide the head of the church should have prevailed against all others, since the patron saint, Patrick, had no heirs by blood.²⁰³ Downpatrick, a royal fort, may be identified with 'the Mount', on the north side of the present town. It is likely to have been close to an early episcopal church, called Druim Lethglaise, 'the ridge on one side of the stream', which may well have been situated just to the south of the Mount, namely where the cathedral is today.²⁰⁴ Yet, to judge by annalistic obits, this only became an important church in the middle of the eighth century, by which time it was called Dún Lethglaise, after the

²⁰⁰ Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 49–50. This has always been the strongest point in its favour (but one which cannot prevail against the testimony of Patrick's *Confessio*). Muirchú, *Vita S. Patricii*, i.11–12.

²⁰¹ Muirchú, *Vita S. Patricii*, i.11.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, ii.5–6; the extension of their claims to Downpatrick is shown by *CGSH* 136.2.

²⁰³ Charles-Edwards, 'Érlam'.

²⁰⁴ The royal fort is attested by AU 496.3 (doublet at 498.1). The obit of Fergus, bishop of Druim Lethglaise, is AU 584.1 (and also in AT and CS, showing that the Chronicle of Ireland had *druim* and not *dún*). The site of the cathedral was already ecclesiastical in the pre-Norman period, as shown by surviving fragments of high crosses and by the round tower which is shown in an eighteenth-century illustration: on all this see D. Flanagan, 'The Names of Downpatrick', *Dinnseanchas*, 4 (1970–1), 89–112.

royal fort.²⁰⁵ A possible explanation is that an early episcopal church, Druim Lethglaise, situated alongside a royal fort, Dún Lethglaise, acquired greater importance as a result of developments in the seventh and eighth centuries: the church, Druim Lethglaise, was acquired by the Uí Díchon of Saul; they may then have translated Patrick's relics to Downpatrick, thus explaining Muirchú's attribution of Patrick's burial-place to both Saul and Downpatrick.

The fictional version of the story of Patrick's service as a slave served to advance one Ulster ecclesiastical kindred, the descendants of Díchu, at the expense of another, Dál mBúain. Local background to the story emerges from the dossier of another Ulster saint, Do Biu (Do Bí, Mo Biu, Mo Bí) of Inis Causcraid (Inch parish, Co. Down; J 47 45), whose feastday is 22 July, but whose obit is unrecorded. The parallel variations in the name-forms make it probable that the patron of Inis Causcraid in the martyrologies is the saint ascribed to Dál mBúain in the genealogies.²⁰⁶ His church was the early predecessor of the Cistercian abbey founded by John de Courcy about 1180.²⁰⁷ Inis Causcraid was two thirds of a mile to the north-west of Downpatrick, the main early 'seat of kingship' for Dál Fiatach,²⁰⁸ similarly, Saul, the home of the Uí Díchon, Díchu mac Trichim's descendants, was two miles to the north-east. The topography suggests, therefore, that the implicit message of the story was an attack on those associated with Dál mBúain. The two churches were potential rivals to be the main local church of the royal fort. The descendants of Díchu at Saul had one handicap balanced by some major advantages. Díchu had no serious early cult: he was not included in the Martyrology of Tallaght or that of Óengus, although his feastday (29 April) was included in the much later Martyrology of Donegal. On the other hand, the late seventh-century Life of Patrick by Muirchú had

²⁰⁵ The first annalistic reference to Dún Lethglaise as a church is probably AU 753.6; cf. 780.13; 790.2. It was a fort, *dún*, in AU 498.2. Against this Muirchú, *Vita S. Patricii*, ii.11, places Patrick's burial-place at Dún Lethglaise, although in ii. 4 he implied that it was at Saul. The *Vita Prima S. Brigidae*, ed. Colgan, c. 60, tr. Connolly, c. 58, has Patrick buried initially 'in a place nearby' and then moved for good to Dún Lethglaise. The place nearby is probably Saul, where Patrick's grave was placed by a note in the Book of Armagh occurring after Tírechán's *Collectanea*, but forming part of the *Breviarium, Patrician Texts*, ed. Bieler, p. 164 (c. 55). This note gives the authority of Columba for Saul as the burial-place. Saul was the burial-place in the Tripartite Life, *VT*² 2969–70, but Dún Lethglaise *ibid.*, 2993–5, in both cases following Muirchú.

²⁰⁶ Do Biu (Do Bí, Mo Biu, Mo Bí) son of Comgall, of Inis Causcraid, *Fél*², Notes, 22 July; *CGSH* 152, 662. 185; Reeves, *Ecclesiastical Antiquities*, pp. 44, 92–3.

²⁰⁷ The vallum of the earlier monastery has been revealed by aerial photography: see A. Hamlin, 'A Recently Discovered Enclosure at Inch Abbey, County Down', *UJA*, 40 (1977), 85–8.

²⁰⁸ The seat of kingship was almost certainly 'The Mount' to the north of the present cathedral and thus closer to Inis Cúscraid: Flanagan, 'The Names of Downpatrick', 89–112.

asserted Saul's claims to be the burial-place of Patrick, the apostle of the Irish. Moreover, when Muirchú asserted both that Saul was the burial-place and also that Downpatrick was the burial-place, he may have been relying on the belief that Patrick was originally buried at Saul, but had by his day been translated to Downpatrick; the translation may have been part of a strategy directed at ensuring that Inis Causcraid should not be the main church adjacent to the royal seat. The first target of the story about Míliucc maccu Búain may have thus have been Inis Causcraid, but, given the close connection between Dál mBúain and Dál Sailni, Connor may also have been implicated. If this explanation is correct, one of the principal elements in the Patrician legend, repeated down to our own day, stemmed from local political and ecclesiastical rivalries in the province of Ulster no later than *c.* 650.

Tírechán's Patrick naturally steered well clear of the principal churches of both Dál nAraidi and Dál Fiatach, Bangor, Movilla and Nendrum. Indeed, there is a parallel between Patrician claims among the Cruithni and those among the Ulaid, ruled by Dál Fiatach. Among the Cruithni, Patrick's hopes were mainly in the north, in Eilne, while the increasingly dominant Dál nAraidi could boast that the patron-saint and founder of Bangor was 'moccu Araidi', that is, a member of their *gens*. Among the Ulaid, Findbarr, the founder of Movilla, was attached to the descendants of a brother of Díchu by the genealogists, but there is a good chance that this was another fiction created by the active minds of the clerics of Saul, since he is likely to have been from Britain.²⁰⁹ Findbarr of Movilla was, however, to become the pre-eminent saint of the Ulaid, just as Cíarán became the leading saint of the Connachta.²¹⁰ Even in the land where he was buried Patrick had major rivals.

²⁰⁹ *CGH* i.411 (LL 331 a 10); *CGSH* 136.1. See below, pp. 293–4.

²¹⁰ *CGSH* 729.1.

CHAPTER TWO

Irish society c. 700: I. Communities

(1) FREE AND UNFREE, NOBLE AND COMMONER

There were three broad categories of layman in Ireland in the seventh and eighth centuries: the aristocrat, the base client and the slave (from now on ‘client’ without qualification will refer to the base client rather than to the more privileged ‘free client’). Between these three there were also intermediate groups, but the three were the principal kinds of person – apart, that is, from people who maintained themselves by skill and knowledge. The latter were sometimes put under a single heading, ‘the people of craft’, *des dána*, to distinguish them from ‘the farming people’, *des trebtha*.¹ For the moment we are solely concerned with ‘the farming people’.²

The deepest divide was between the aristocrat and the client, on the one side, and the slave on the other. The slave class was recruited by birth, judicial penalty and, most importantly, force – as in the great slave raids on western Britain in the fourth and fifth centuries.³ Slaves from overseas were usually more valuable than natives for they found it more difficult to escape:⁴ Patrick had to cross the width of Ireland and secure passage in an Irish ship before he could get to his native island.⁵ His venture remained on a knife-edge throughout. Female slaves were valued partly because they could be sexually exploited, partly because

¹ *CIH* 40.10; *Cóir Anmann*, ed. W. Stokes, *Irische Texte*, iii.2 (Leipzig, 1897), § 149; *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, ed. O’Rahilly, line 2045.

² They were also known as the *grád túaithe* ‘lay grades’: *Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchy, §§ 1–3, lines 4, 6, 10.

³ F. Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, Early Irish Law Series, 3 (Dublin, 1988), pp. 95–7; birth: *Vita Prima S. Brigitae*, tr. Connolly, 4 (Dubthach could have sold Brigit, his child by his slave, Broicsech); judicial penalty: *ibid.*, 18.

⁴ This explanation is given by the commentary at *CIH* 1913.16–17.

⁵ Patrick, *Confessio*, in L. Bieler (ed.), *Libri Epistolarum Sancti Patricii Episcopi*, 2 vols. (Irish Manuscripts Commission, Dublin, 1952), 17–18; for the law affecting runaway slaves, see Kelly, *Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 95.

escape was, for them, even more difficult than it was for the men.⁶ If raiders killed, they were more likely to kill the men but enslave the women.⁷ Slavewomen even supplied a standard unit of value, the *cumal*, partly, no doubt, because there was a slave-market, but also perhaps because the slavewoman was ubiquitous, a regular and commonplace consequence of violence.⁸

A corollary of slavery was that acceptable and organised violence was deployed only by the free, both aristocrat and client. The slave was necessarily regarded as a non-combatant. The client was expected to follow his lord in war as he served him in peace, but nobody would arm his slaves unless he were desperate.⁹ Freedmen were indeed armed – were even regarded as valued personal guards – but not the unfree.¹⁰ Freedom, therefore, went with being a *gaisscedach*, an armed man. The arms were, however, modest: the *gaissced* consisted of *gai* ‘spear’ and *sciath* ‘shield’, and almost certainly had consisted of these two items for centuries.¹¹ Swords were short and were normally only borne by aristocrats. Long swords, helmets and mailcoats are only attested in the Viking age, and even then helmets and mailcoats were rare. To judge by literary evidence, the taking of arms was a rite of passage, a ceremony which marked off one period of a person’s life from the next.¹² It was also a ceremony which distinguished free from unfree and male from female, since it was open only to the free male. Weapons may often have been given by kings and lords to those below them: a sword in the possession of Brigit’s aristocratic father, Dubthach, belonged to the king;¹³ even the great hero Cú Chulainn, when he took arms, received a spear and shield belonging to his king and maternal uncle, Conchobor mac Nessa.¹⁴

In non-legal sources, the nobles are quite often distinguished from

⁶ Penitentials of Vinnian, cc. 39–40, and Cummian, cc. 26–7 (ed. Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, pp. 88, 116). Patrick, *Epistola ad Milites Corotici*, in Bieler (ed.), *Libri Epistolarum*, c. 14, envisages the Irish captives being sexually exploited: ‘quasi in lupanar tradis membra Christi’, ‘it is as if you are handing over the limbs of Christ into a brothel’.

⁷ The Vikings appear to have been after female slaves in 821, when they took women from Howth: AU 821.3.

⁸ Brigit’s mother, a slavewoman initially belonging to Brigit’s father, Dubthach, had been sold twice during the nine months she was carrying the future saint: *Vita Prima*, tr. Connolly, cc. 4–5. For the *cumal* see F. Kelly, *Early Irish Farming* (Dublin, 1988), pp. 591–3, and *ETWK*, pp. 482–3.

⁹ For the military duties of base clients see *Cáin Aicillne*, ed. and tr. R. Thurneysen, *zCP*, 14 (1923), pp. 336–94, § 9. ¹⁰ *Crith Gablach*, ed. Binchy, § 33, lines 477–80.

¹¹ O’Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology*, p. 461.

¹² *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, ed. O’Rahilly, pp. 19–20 (text), 142–3 (tr.).

¹³ *Bethu Brigte*, ed. Ó hAodha, lines 126–7; *Vita Prima S. Brigitae*, tr. Connolly, cc. 18, 88.

¹⁴ *Táin Bó Cúailnge, Rec. I*, ed. O’Rahilly, lines 616–26.

others as *errid*, 'chariot-warriors'.¹⁵ This is indubitably an ancient category, but it is doubtful whether chariot-fighting was a normal feature of Irish warfare after the sixth century.¹⁶ The chariots were light structures drawn by two horses, driven by one man but providing a fighting-platform for a second.¹⁷ The aristocratic warrior, the *eirr*, used his chariot both to transport himself at speed and as a platform from which to discharge throwing-spears. The next stage of fighting would be done on foot.

Women were expected to be non-combatants. This was presumably always so, but it was the innovation of Adomnán, abbot of Iona, to secure in 697 the enactment of The Law of the Innocents, which was designed to enforce the immunity of women, children and clerics from having violence used against them.¹⁸ This immunity was to be secured by an elaborate network of guarantors and penalties.¹⁹ The strategy was to draw existing powers into the business of enforcement by offering them a share of the fines. What Adomnán was seeking, therefore, was a situation in which the three great classes of free non-combatants – women, children and clerics – should be kept safe from both participation in, and suffering from, violence. The linkage of the two is clearest in the case of the children: those protected by Adomnán's law were 'innocent children', by which the abbot meant, not that children were morally innocent, but that, before the boys took arms, they were innocent of participation in that particular form of evil.²⁰ The other great category of non-combatants, slaves, is not mentioned in Adomnán's Law: it was inconceivable that they should be rendered immune from

¹⁵ CGH i.24–5 (118 b 41, 118 b 48–9); *Compert Con Culainn*, § 1, *Aided Óenfir Aife*, § 5, both ed. A. G. Van Hamel, *Compert Con Culainn and Other Stories* (Dublin, 1933), pp. 3, 12.

¹⁶ The antiquity is shown by the brilliant etymologies proposed by M. A. O'Brien for *eirr* and *arae*: 'Etymologies and Notes: 4. O.Ir. *eirr* and *arae*', *Celtica*, 3 (1956), 170. Cf. Adomnán, *VSC* i.7; AU 811.2.

¹⁷ D. Greene, 'The Chariot as Described in Irish Literature', in C. Thomas (ed.), *The Iron Age in the Irish Sea Province*, Council for British Archaeology Report (London, 1972), pp. 59–72; J. P. Mallory and T. E. McNeill, *The Archaeology of Ulster, from Colonization to Plantation* (Belfast, 1991), pp. 157–8; for the background see S. Piggott, *Wagon, Chariot and Carriage: Symbol and Status in the History of Transport* (London, 1992), pp. 37–68.

¹⁸ AU 697.3; *Cáin Adomnáin*, ed. and tr. K. Meyer, *Anecdota Oxoniensia*, Med. and Mod. Ser., 12 (Oxford, 1905); tr. G. Márkus, *Adomnán's 'Law of the Innocents': A Seventh Century Law for the Protection of Non-Combatants* (Glasgow, 1997). The text, as it survives, is a later product of the church of Raphoe (of which Adomnán was patron saint), in which later prefatory narrative precedes what is likely to be original text. This later material asserts that women had been combatants before 697, but there is no evidence to corroborate the claim and it seems to rest on an illegitimate inference from the older text.

¹⁹ R. Chapman Stacey, *The Road to Judgment from Custom to Court in Medieval Ireland and Wales* (Philadelphia, 1994), pp. 94–7.

²⁰ *Cáin Adomnáin*, § 34: the law holds for 'innocent children until they are capable of killing someone'.

violence, since servility as a whole could not continue without the threat of violence. Since, then, the free and lay male child was expected to take arms and learn how to use them, the development of children separated free and slave, male and female, lay and clerical. While the brother was learning how to use his arms, his well-bred sister was learning embroidery and other handicrafts.²¹

Those who exercised a power regularly sustained by force and the threat of force were, therefore, free and male. This broad grouping was divided into the two categories of nobles and clients. Although the clients served their noble lords, they were distinguished from slaves and from the half-free *fuidir* and *bothach* by two crucial advantages. First, they had their own lands, most of them, at least, passed down by inheritance; secondly, their services and renders were finite and fixed in advance by contract.²² The slave, however, did not have independent landed resources and did not know in advance what services he might be expected to do. Moreover, while the slave was expected to do manual labour as required, some clients – the so-called ‘free clients’ – were immune from all labour obligations. Even the ‘base clients’ only did harvest work and laboured at building their lord’s fort.²³ Otherwise, the obligations of clients were either personal – such as following a lord in war and feud or participating in mourning his death – or they consisted of economic dues: hospitality given to him and his companions or in the annual food-render.²⁴ The main agricultural work on the lord’s land was not done by his clients: that was work for slaves or the intermediate class of the half-free. The half-free were, for the most part, persons in the economic position of slaves but of free descent; their position would become hereditary, and thus their economic position fixed by status, only if they continued as half-free for four generations.²⁵

The character of Irish clientship can best be understood by comparing it with the relationship of lord and *colonus* that typifies the great estates of Carolingian Francia in the ninth century.²⁶ A way to understand the difference is to consider the simplest situation: one lord and one dependant. In both cases, Frankish and Irish, there are two holdings of land, one directly cultivated by or on behalf of the lord, the other

²¹ *Tochmarc Emire*, ed. Van Hamel, *Compert Con Culainn and Other Stories*, p. 23, § 10; Kelly, *Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 87.

²² *Cáin Aicillne*, ed. and tr. Thurneysen, § 1; *Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchy, §§ 24, 26, lines 332, 378.

²³ *CIH* 434, 30; *Críth Gablach*, § 45, line 570. ²⁴ Kelly, *Guide to Early Irish Law*, pp. 30–1.

²⁵ *Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchy, § 23, lines 326–7; D. A. Binchy, ‘The Original Meaning of *co nómad* náu (nó)’, *Celtica*, 16 (1984), 1–12; *EIWK*, pp. 307–36.

²⁶ G. Duby, *L’Economie rurale et la vie des campagnes dans l’occident médiéval* (Paris, 1962), pp. 100–29.

cultivated by the dependant, Frankish *colonus* or Irish client. For present purposes, both Frankish holdings belong to the lord. In return for the *colonus* doing some of the work on the lord's holding, the latter allows the *colonus* to cultivate the other holding. The lord thus owns both holdings; the *colonus* works on both holdings; the lord takes all the revenue from his own holding; and, via some renders and rents, the lord also takes a fixed share from the production of the holding cultivated solely by the *colonus*. Ownership rights are concentrated in the lord's hands, work in the *colonus*, and the lord takes the lion's share of the proceeds. In Ireland, however, one holding belongs to the lord and one to the client. In principle, the lord need not have more land than the client; but what he does have is livestock, beyond what his own holding can support;²⁷ the reverse side of the coin is that the client has less livestock than he needs to cultivate his holding. This imbalance is rectified by the lord granting livestock to the client in return for services and renders. So, while Frankish lordship rests on a concentration of land in one person's ownership to the exclusion of the other, Irish lordship rests on a concentration of livestock in one person's ownership to the exclusion of the other. In both cases, lordship rests on an imbalance in the ownership of an essential factor of production: in Francia this is land, in Ireland it is capital, in the form of livestock.

Having stated this simplest case, we may now consider the differences in more detail. A Frankish lord had rights over both the *colonus* and his land. The land could not be removed from the lord's possession without his agreement, and the *colonus* who worked the land did so partly for his lord. Moreover, the lord also had rights over the *colonus*: he, too, could not be removed or remove himself from the lord. The *colonus*, for his part, enjoyed the right to work the land and to support himself and his family from his holding. In other words, everything depended on a three-term relationship between lord, *colonus* and land: the lord had rights in both land and *colonus*, the *colonus* had rights in the land matching a duty to give economic support to the lord. What the lord offered the *colonus* was the right to work the land and protection of that right. Because the *colonus* lacked the lord's land and also his social and political power, the lord had something essential to offer the *colonus*, the power to give and to protect the latter's livelihood.

The Irish situation was different. The lord did not offer the client land and the protected right to cultivate it, but rather the livestock to enable

²⁷ Cf. *Crith Gablach*, ed. Binchy, § 19, lines 250–2.

him to work the land. Of the three classical factors of production – land, capital and labour – Frankish lordship worked through land, Irish lordship through capital. Although the early eighth-century law tract *Críth Gablach* envisages a substantial farmer, a *mruigfer*, as possessing a wide range of tools, his livestock formed the most important resource which he applied to the cultivation of his land.²⁸ It was the livestock which came to him as a grant or ‘fief’ from a lord.²⁹

The agriculture practised in Ireland in the early Christian period was mixed, an interdependent balance of arable and livestock.³⁰ This reflected the diet, in which, except in times of famine, a bread element would be combined with meat, vegetables and dairy products in varying proportions according to the wealth and status of the person and also according to the season. Meat consumption was relatively heavy in the winter, especially in the ‘guesting season’ between 1 January and the beginning of Lent. At this period of the year, the lord was entitled to bring a large company to be entertained in the house of his client.³¹ At other times the client’s meat consumption might be reduced to nothing, or be confined to bacon, while the lord, having enjoyed the meat of his client’s house during the guesting season, could now enjoy his own as well as the meat element in the client’s winter and summer renders. The render due to the lord also included a considerable cereal element, in the form both of bread grain, properly dried so as to compensate for the moist Irish climate, and of malted barley for making ale. A standard division of the diet was into three elements: bread, whatever accompanied the bread (varying according to the season), and drink.³² Since the drink element in the render paid by client to lord was ale – or malted barley ready to make ale – cereals supplied two of the three elements of the diet.

The normal ‘fief’ given by the lord to the client at the outset of the relationship apparently took the form of cattle, other than in exceptional circumstances.³³ Returning, then, to the three factors of production,

²⁸ For the equipment see *Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchy, § 14, lines 173–82, discussed by Kelly, *Early Irish Farming*, pp. 463–502. The importance of tools is shown by the provisions for loaning them in exchange for interest: *CIH* 921.9–36.

²⁹ T. M. Charles-Edwards, ‘*Críth Gablach* and the Law of Status’, *Peritia*, 5 (1986), 67–72, and *EIWK*, p. 353; for a different interpretation, see N. T. Patterson, *Cattle-Lords and Clansmen: Kinship and Rank in Early Ireland* (New York, 1991), pp. 132–3.

³⁰ On what follows see Kelly, *Early Irish Farming*, pp. 316–43.

³¹ D. A. Binchy, ‘Aimser Chue’, in *Féil-sgríbhinn Eóin Mhic Néill*, ed. J. Ryan (Dublin, 1940), pp. 18–22.

³² *Annlann* could be used for the accompaniment as a whole, Kelly, *Early Irish Farming*, p. 316; *tarsuinn* or *sercol tarsuinn* was the delicacy within the *annlann*, *ibid.*, pp. 316–17.

³³ *EIWK*, pp. 338, 360–1.

land, capital and labour, we can see that the lord provided capital in the form of livestock, but received in return an annual render which consisted not just of animal products, whether meat, butter or cheese, but also of cereals, the product of the client's arable farming.³⁴ In part, this reflects the role of the client as the one who 'feeds' his lord; in part, also, the crucial point that the arable side of the client's farming depended on his livestock. Not only were there the plough-oxen, but also the manure from livestock formed an appreciable part of its value and was essential to maintaining the fertility of the land.³⁵

It is an underlying assumption of the lawyers' descriptions of base clientship that the client needs to accept a fief of livestock from the lord. He cannot therefore have expected to provide this factor of production from his own resources. It is a further assumption that this dependence on a lord's grant of cattle will be repeated as the generations pass. In the northern half of Ireland base clientship endured until the death of the lord; if the client died first, his heirs had to step into the dead man's shoes.³⁶ Once the lord had died, however, the livestock he had granted to the client – or, perhaps, the calves of the cattle he gave – remained in the client's possession, provided that he had served the lord for at least seven years.³⁷ In Munster, the same rule applied if the lord and the client were in adjacent social ranks; but the more they were divided in rank, the longer the client and his heirs had to serve the lord before the fief passed into their ownership.³⁸

The implications of the more or less temporary nature of clientship are crucial. Where the contractual relationship ended on the death of the lord and the bulk of the client's livestock came to him in the form of a grant by his lord, the livestock renders, combined with consumption including the hospitality given to the lord, must have eaten into the client's livestock. Only such a diminution would ensure that the heirs of most clients needed to receive a new grant of livestock from a lord. The especially lucky or the especially prudent client might escape from this cycle and so become what *Críth Gablach* calls 'a man of withdrawal' – a man who 'withdrew his status as a cattle-freeman from the forepurchase of clients' – but these exceptional farmers will have been balanced by the unfortunate or feckless nobles who ceased to be able to grant livestock to clients. There

³⁴ *Cáin Aicillne*, ed. Thurneysen, §§ 8–13; *EIWK*, pp. 354–5.

³⁵ Kelly, *Early Irish Farming*, pp. 229–30.

³⁶ *CIH* 436.9; 486.24–5; *Cáin Aicillne*, ed. Thurneysen, § 24.

³⁷ *Ibid.*; according to another text, perhaps of the ninth century, three years' food-renders were sufficient: *CIH* 921.39–40. ³⁸ *CIH* 2230.16–17, 24–5.

was movement of clients into lordship and lords into clientship, but the norm will have been the cycle already described by which the heirs of clients were forced by lack of capital to become clients themselves. It was a corollary of this cycle that a client often needed to take a second or even a third grant of livestock and so become the client of more than one lord.³⁹ Irish lordship thus rested on the scarcity of one essential factor of production: livestock. This was not a scarcity determined by natural conditions – Ireland was then, as it is now, a country well suited to livestock farming;⁴⁰ rather, it was a scarcity engineered by the terms of the bargain between lord and client, by the way the initial grant was a ‘forepurchase’ of annual renders and hospitality, and by the way in which these renders and hospitality decreased the size of the client’s stock.

In Munster the economic relationship must sometimes have worked differently. Let us compare two cases given by the Munster lawtract *Bretha Nemed Toísech*: on the one hand, the fief given by a noble of the lowest grade, an *aire désa*, to a substantial free commoner, a *bóaire*; on the other, the fief given by an *aire ard* (‘high noble’) to a *bóaire*.⁴¹

The fief that an *aire désa* grants to a *bóaire* is not returned until heirs return it to heirs. He grants five *séts*, or [in other words] the value of a cow with its accompaniment is the corresponding render for them [the five *séts*], for it is an ounce [of silver] which pays the rent for three cows from one year to the next; an ounce is for the value of a cow with its accompaniment; eight scruples⁴² the value of a beef-carcase, eight scruples are equivalent to eight sacks of malted barley; four scruples for a flitch; three for a pig; one scruple for a sack of wheat . . . The fief that an *aire ard* grants to a *bóaire* is not returned until *indui*, ‘end-grandsons’, return it to ‘end-grandsons’.

The upshot of this passage is that the annual render was one third of the value of the fief. This may be related to another principle, to which we shall return later, by which the value of cattle and cattle products could be divided into three: one third belonged to the owner of the land on which they were grazed; a second third to the owner of the cattle from which they were born; and the final third belonged to the person who looked after the cattle. In effect, these shares belonged to the three classical factors of production, land, capital and labour. The client grazed the cattle on his own land, and also looked after them; but the lord contributed the original stock and was thus entitled to one third, while the client took two thirds.

³⁹ *Cáin Aicillne*, ed. Thurneysen, §§ 28–9. ⁴⁰ A fact noticed by Bede, *HE* i.1.

⁴¹ *CIH* 2230.16–20, 28–9. Contrast 920.6–8.

⁴² A scruple was 1/24 of an ounce (in this case of silver).

This may have been the basis of the Munster lawyers' doctrine, but it produced a result which made clientship a different institution from its counterpart in the northern half of Ireland. The contrast between clientship in Munster and clientship in the north is, moreover, the most important local difference revealed by the laws, and it deserves close consideration.⁴³ A starting-point for an analysis is the ratio of one third: the render is to be one third of the value of the fief. This is not, in reality, the same as the share of one third that belongs to the owner of livestock in the division according to which one third each goes to the owner of the land, the owner of the (parent) livestock and the person who does the work. In that case what was divided into thirds was the current stock at the point when participants in the enterprise went their different ways. If that pattern had been applied to clientship, it would have been used when the client and the lord parted company. Let us say for the sake of argument that a client's livestock all comes from the lord and that they part company after seven years; the effect of the principle will then be that the livestock existing at the end of the seven years will be divided, and that one third of any animals descended from the original livestock granted to the client seven years previously will go to the lord as owner of the original stock. In other words, the fraction would not have been of the original fief of stock granted by the lord to the client, but of the offspring of that fief.

The fraction of a third is found in the northern texts, but only for free as opposed to base clientship. In free clientship the client receives a comparatively small fief, which is thus a slight addition to livestock he has inherited or acquired by other means. The client can end the relationship at any time he wishes, whereas the base client can do so, if at all, only by incurring heavy penalties. The northern tract on free clientship appears to assume that the client will not receive any economic return from the small fief he has received: the annual render going to the lord, of one third of the value of the fief, apparently represents the total expected return from cattle-farming. At the end of the clientship the lord will receive back the entire fief; it will not, as it may in base clientship, pass into the possession of the client. In effect, the lord gets the entire return, although the client has contributed two of the three factors of production, land and labour. The point seems to be, first, that the fief is so small that it makes only minor demands on the client's land and labour; and, secondly, that it is an aspect of the honourable

⁴³ Closer than that given in *EIWK*, pp. 359–60, and esp. p. 362 (the explanation given there now seems to me quite insufficient, although it may have a minor usefulness).

character of the relationship from the client's point of view not only that he can return the fief at any time, ending the relationship, but also that it is of no economic benefit to him. The relationship creates a clientship which, by its very paradoxical nature, demonstrates that the client is not economically dependent on the lord. On this view the benefits of the relationship to the free client were social and political rather than economic.

The Munster client cannot return the fief when he likes. In the north, the fief became a base client's property on the death of the lord, provided that he had served his lord as he should; a free client's fief was returned to his lord whenever the client wished, and at any rate after seven years. The Munster lawyer, however, talks of the client returning the fief – like the northern free client, but unlike him in that it is returned no earlier than after the death of both lord and client.⁴⁴ Indeed, the southern client's capacity to end the clientship is even more constricted than is that of the northern base client. The best he can hope for is that he is a *bóaire*, a substantial commoner, and that his lord is of the lowest rank of noble, that of the *aire désa*. The clientship will then endure until the death of both parties, so that the heirs of the client can return the value of the fief to the lord's heirs. In the north, however, base clientship endures until the death of the lord: if he predeceases the client, the latter is not obliged to serve his lord's heirs. In two ways, therefore, the southern client is worse off than his northern counterpart: his subjection lasts longer and the fief is returned to the lord even when the client has given good service to the end of his life.

What is most remarkable, however, is the contrast between the fiefs. Both the northern and the southern *bóaire* owe their lord each year a cow and various accessory renders; according to one text, the northern lord grants his client the value of fifteen cows at the outset; according to another he grants him twenty cows. His southern counterpart grants the client the value of three cows and yet gets the same annual render. The differences may be tabulated as follows in table 2.1. When compared under these headings, southern clientship seems implausibly more disadvantageous to the client than northern clientship.

The explanation may be, as with free clientship in the north, that the context was quite different. It appears to be the case, though the texts never state this outright, that the bulk of the northern base client's livestock came to him as a grant or fief from his lord. What will make

⁴⁴ The text envisages the possibility that animals forming part of the original grant may outlive both lord and client: *CIH* 2231.12.

Table 2.1. *Northern and southern clientship compared*

Render	Fief	Period of service
Northern clientship 1 cow etc.	15/20 cows	until death of lord
Southern clientship 1 cow etc.	3 cows	until death of both lord and client or longer

sense of southern clientship is to make the opposite assumption for Munster, as we have already done for the northern free client. Let us assume for the sake of argument that a standard southern client might have a herd of about seventeen cows by inheritance or by way of the contribution to their farm made by his wife's family. Let us also assume that he receives a fief of three cows from his lord, bringing the total to twenty cows, exactly the same as the fief of a substantial commoner according to *Críth Gablach*.⁴⁵ Their stock is now identical, and so also are their renders – one cow with accessories each year.

Two interconnected problems remain. The accounts of northern base clientship make sense only if most base clients needed, on the death of their lords, to enter into a new clientship. Otherwise there would be no reason why clientship should have endured for more than one generation. The combined effect of the annual food-render, his own consumption and the compulsory hospitality given to the lord and his lord's company would so reduce his stock that he was compelled to enter into new clientships. And, indeed, the lawtracts assume that a client will have a second and even a third lord, even within, let alone after, the lifetime of the first lord. Yet the same must not happen with the southern client: first, his clientship may endure for generations without being renewed by another fief; secondly, if his stock were reduced like that of his northern counterpart, he would in effect become exactly like his northern counterpart – that is to say, his livestock would now come from his lord rather than through inheritance or marriage to an equal.⁴⁶ However, our model situation sketched in the previous paragraph envisaged the northern and southern clients having the same stock and the same render.

Why, then, if the stock of the northern client was reduced in the

⁴⁵ *Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchy, § 15, lines 203–4, where two *cumals* = twenty cows (cf. *EIWK*, pp. 480–1).

⁴⁶ It would not come through marriage, since marriage was expected to be to the daughter of an equal, in other words, someone in the same position as himself.

course of the clientship, was the same not true for the stock of the southern client? There is, needless to say, no definite answer; in any case, we are arguing in terms of what seem to be implications of the model clientships described in the laws. One possibility, however, is that the element of compulsory hospitality may have been much less onerous in Munster than it was in the north. Another is that there was no, or less, livestock in the 'accessory' part of the render.

Yet even though the terms of the bargain between lord and client in the northern half of Ireland may have worked to keep the latter in economic dependency, the relationship between the two had a less overtly political character than did lordship in Francia. In Francia the renders and services due from the *colonus* rested directly upon the property rights of the lord. The lord owned the land and had rights also in the *colonus*. These legal rights ensured that, while the *colonus* worked the land, the lord had a share in the proceeds. The lord's revenue derived from a power over land and man that was enshrined in legal rights, themselves part of the political order. In that sense, the relationship was overtly political. In Ireland this was much less clear. The relationship was contractual: in terms of the legal order, the rights of the lord rested on an agreement made with him by the client. Whereas the Frankish lord's ownership of the land was expected to continue indefinitely, the northern Irish lord's ownership of the livestock granted to his client might endure only for seven years. At that point what began as a loan would become an outright grant. The renders and services of the client thus answered a grant by the lord: in that sense it was an exchange, an honourable relationship between two parties both of whom were ultimately independent agents.

The more advantageous position of the Irish client was matched by the character of the renders and services he performed for his lord. The obligations of the Carolingian *colonus* consisted largely in regular labour done on the demesne of the lord. He also owed renders – though generally of such things as wood rather than food – and a limited amount of money. The Carolingian *colonus* fed his lord by the work he did on the lord's land; the Irish client fed his lord by the work he did on his own land. Furthermore, the Irish client's feeding of his lord took two forms: renders delivered to the lord's house and hospitality supplied to the lord in the client's house. One would be surprised to hear of a Carolingian *colonus* entertaining his lord in his own house, but this was the regular expectation in Ireland. There was, therefore, less social distance between Irish lord and client than between Carolingian lord and *colonus*.

The corollary of this was that slavery was more central to the Irish economy than to the Frankish. The information about Irish slavery is not as full as one could wish, but one of the most important conclusions is to be obtained rather by what is not said about the client than what is said about the slave. The client does not contribute more than some harvest-work to the main labour needs of the lord's land. The implication is either that the lord's land was slight in extent or that slaves and those classes called *fuidir* and *bothach*, intermediate between client and slave, filled the gap – or else some combination of these two explanations. The evidence is unclear on this issue. On the one hand, the longest and most detailed tract on status, *Críth Gablach*, treats the holding of a noble as no different in essence from that of a substantial commoner and client.⁴⁷ It contributes no more to his status;⁴⁸ even the *aire tuísea*, one of the higher grades of noble, has one plough-team like the substantial freeman.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the very fact that a considerable part of the lord's consumption derives from the food-renders of his clients means that he will have had less need of production from his own land. The area of land devoted to 'feeding the lord' (and his household) included both his own land and a proportion of the land of his clients. The Frankish lord, however, was fed from his own demesne. On the other hand, the anecdotal evidence suggest that agricultural slaves were a normal part of society.⁵⁰

(II) COMMUNITIES

In discussing modern societies, a distinction is sometimes made between the state and 'civil society'. By the 'state' is meant the apparatus of government rather than the entire political community; by 'civil society' all those institutions, groups and practices which order people in society but are not part of the apparatus of government. The family, for example, is part of civil society, while a police force or a department of the civil service is part of the state. It is approximately true that early Irish kingdoms were all civil society and no state. There was a king, and the king had servants, but royal government worked by giving a direction to civil society rather than through an order of state servants separate from civil society. The king's judge was the judge who accompanied

⁴⁷ Charles-Edwards, 'Críth Gablach and the Law of Status', 57–8.

⁴⁸ *Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchy, §§ 24, 26, lines 354–7, 376–8 etc.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, §§ 14, 27, lines 181–2, 409–10.

⁵⁰ E.g. *Vita Prima S. Brigitae*, tr. Connolly, cc. 6–7, 16; Patrick himself provides an earlier example.

and advised the king; judges as such were not part of a royal bureaucracy. Characteristic of Irish methods of government was the *aire coisring*, ‘aire of constraint’, also called ‘the *aire* of a kindred’ because he gave ‘a pledge on behalf of his kindred to king and synod and crafts-people so as to subject them [his kinsmen] to authority’.⁵¹ He was recognised by his kinsmen as their representative in relation to various authorities – royal, ecclesiastical and ‘people of craft’; these authorities thus employed a power existing within the kindred so as to enforce their rule. By undertaking this office on behalf of his kindred the *aire coisring* secured for himself a higher status. His role thus involved his lineage, his own personal status and contractual obligations, themselves secured by his pledge – all in the interests of creating a nexus between public authority and the kindred. Similarly, the lord was a patron of his client in public affairs, defending his rights within the terms of royal or ecclesiastical edict, of treaty and of contract.⁵² The broad divisions of men into nobles, clients and slaves were therefore part of this ordering of Irish society through which the king and others ruled.

It is convenient to make a distinction between two broad social categories. First, there are what I shall call ‘communities’, understood as modes of life which bring individuals into communication and cooperation; on the other hand, status separated them into distinct ranks. It is a distinction between what associated and what distinguished individuals. These two forms of social ordering were sustained by distinct values: on the one hand, cooperative values such as patience and, on the other, competitive values such as courage or eloquence. So, for example, *Bretha Comaithchesa*, a lawtract about cooperation and disputes among neighbouring farmers, begins by declaring that status is irrelevant to neighbourhood:⁵³

Judgements on neighbourhood here. Why is neighbourhood so called? There is equal custom in it, for the custom by which each man exacts fines and penalties from his fellow is equally good; alternatively, it is neighbourhood because a noble receives them [sc. fines and penalties] in the same way as a commoner, and an ecclesiastical superior as a [mere] cleric.

First, then, communities. Here a further broad distinction may be helpful, namely, between communities to which people belonged without anyone taking any special initiative and those which required some deliberate act before someone became a member. Those of the first type I shall call ‘opt-out communities’, because, although no deliberate action

⁵¹ *Crith Gablach*, ed. Binchy, § 20, lines 280–2.

⁵² *Ibid.*, § 24, lines 339–40.

⁵³ *CIH* 64.6–9.

was normally required to make someone a member, none the less a person could be expelled from such a group – or he could expel himself, as did the *peregrinus*, the ascetic who chose exile precisely because it separated him from the communities of his homeland. Kindreds, for example, are the most obvious of the communities to which one usually belonged without any deliberate act of incorporation: being the acknowledged son or daughter of a particular father was enough. There were, however, circumstances, such as going to live with a woman in another *túath*, in which, as we shall see later, someone withdrew from a kindred. There were also offences for which one could be expelled: a father could ‘proclaim’ an undutiful son and thereby render him effectively kinless.⁵⁴ The kindred, then, is a prime example of an opt-out community. On the other hand, a form of kinship of central importance in Irish society, fosterage, provides an equally clear-cut case of the other type, the ‘opt-in community’. Fosterage united not only the foster-parents and the foster-child, but also the foster-parents and the natural parents as well as the foster-children and the natural children. The fosterage community, uniting natural parents and children with foster-parents and children, was a counterpart in early medieval Ireland to the modern western European ‘family’. Fosterage, however, was a set of relationships created by contract, a formal agreement between the natural parents and the foster-parents.⁵⁵

As we shall see, the distinction between opt-in and opt-out communities is best seen as a spectrum of possibilities in which the one element rather than the other might be predominant, rather than an absolute division. Even natural paternity might be created in social terms by the mother affiliating the child to a father and by paternity being formally acknowledged by the father. When the union between the parent was informal the act of affiliation would probably have to be correspondingly formal, whereas, when the mother had been given in marriage to the father, paternity was presumed. In some cases, of course, paternity was presumed wrongly: the natural father of the child was not the spouse of the mother. In such cases there was a clear rule: ‘Every cuckold has a right to his child until he be purchased from him.’⁵⁶ Unless or until such

⁵⁴ *Berrad Airechta*, § 36 = *CIH* 593.26–34, tr. R. Chapman Stacey in Charles-Edwards *et al.* (eds.), *Lawyers and Laymen*, p. 215.

⁵⁵ There is little mention in early sources of godparenthood, but cf. *AT* 1092: ‘Ruaidrí of the Yellow Bitch, son of Áed of the Gapped Spear, descendant of Conchobor, was blinded by Ua Flaithbertaigh and by Fagartaigh Húa Fagartaigh – and that was a wretched deed on the part of Ua Flaithbertaigh, that is to blind his foster-father and his “Christ-kin” [*cairdis Críst*] seven times over and his lord.’ ⁵⁶ *CIH* 294.13; *CGH* i.140 (141 a 15); *EIWK*, p. 315.

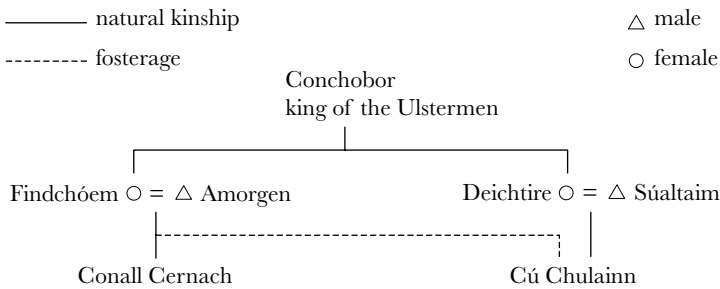


Fig. 2.1. Kinship and fosterage

purchase occurred, the child belonged to a kindred by virtue of the contract of marriage between the presumed father and the mother, not by virtue of physical paternity.

Although fosterage created an opt-in community which may be termed ‘artificial’ in that a deliberate act was required to create it, it was perceived as being fuelled by entirely natural emotions. To be ‘reared on one knee and suckled at one breast’ was the closest of bonds, a link not just between natural siblings but between natural child and foster-child.⁵⁷ Relationships of both kinds could be combined, as in the case of the legendary hero Cú Chulainn. As befitted a nobleman, he had several fosterers, creating a network of alliances centred on Cú Chulainn himself, but his first fosterage was with his mother’s sister and her husband, and in this fosterage he was reared together with their own son, Conall Cernach (fig. 2.1).⁵⁸

This arrangement bound the king’s two daughters’ sons to each other, but also bound the two sets of parents; and, whereas in terms of natural kinship Amorgen and Súaltaim were bound to each other only through their wives, in terms of fosterage they were linked though Cú Chulainn. A community created in the first place by natural kinship, extended by the contract of marriage, was strengthened by fosterage, an ‘opt-in’ form of kinship.

⁵⁷ *Cath Maíge Mucrama: The Battle of Mag Mucrama*, ed. M. O Daly, Irish Texts Society, 50 (1975), p. 38, § 2; cf. *Compert Con Culainn*, ed. Van Hamel, p. 8: ‘Di chích a máthar cích Finnochóeme’, ‘Finnochóem’s teat is the two teats of his mother’ – Finnochóem, the natural mother of Conall Cernach, being the foster-mother of Cú Chulainn and suckling them both.

⁵⁸ In this diagram I give the relationships as they are set out in *Compert Con Culainn*, ed. Van Hamel, which differs from *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (but note LU’s reading in *Compert Con Culainn*, § 6, n. 6, agreeing with *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, according to which Deichtire was Conchobor’s sister).

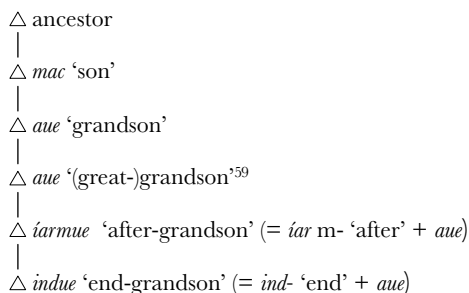


Fig. 2.2. Descendants

(a) Kinship

The first community to be discussed is, then, the kindred. Irish kinship was, however, as has already been illustrated, a complex and flexible matter. To start with, there is the kinship of inheritance, inheritance both of land and of office. This was patrilineal or agnatic, that is to say, this form of kinship was created by descent in the male line. For these purposes, a man or woman belonged to the kindred of his or her father. As we shall see, kinship through the mother was also of central importance, as in the fictional example of Conall Cernach and Cú Chulainn cited above, but this was for other purposes than inheritance of land or office. Leaving aside for a moment the inheritance of office and concentrating instead on land, inheritance worked through a system linking together two perspectives on the kindred, that of the ancestor and that of a descendant. From the ancestor's point of view, the kindred was a sequence of descendants (fig. 2.2). Since the common ancestor might have more than one son or grandson in any generation, his kindred appeared to be a tree with branches. The ancestor was the trunk and his descendants were the branches. When tracing the interrelationships of a royal or noble family, the genealogist would follow the *cráeba coibnesa*, 'branches of kinship', all the way from the *bun*, the trunk, to the *barr*, the very topmost branches. The *bun* gave its unity to the kindred as it did to the tree. Kindreds were named after the common ancestor: they were 'the Descendants of Coirpre' or 'the Kindred of Maine' (Uí Choirpri, Cenél Maini).

⁵⁹ It is part of the theory I am proposing that *aue* stands for both grandson and great-grandson.

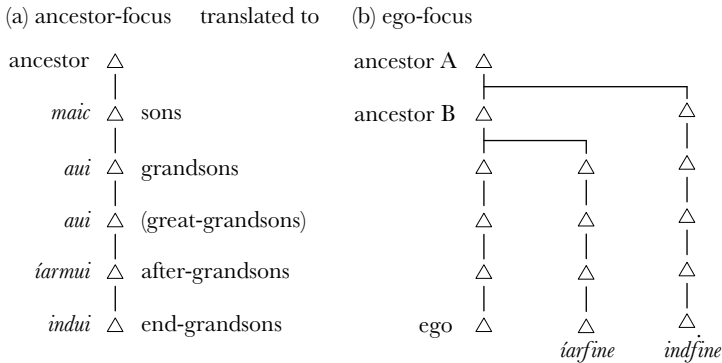


Fig. 2.3. Ancestor-focus and ego-focus

Derived from the ancestor's perspective was the viewpoint of the living descendant, whom I shall call 'ego' to indicate that terms of kinship are being perceived from his standpoint. The reason for calling him 'ego' is that such terms, relating kinsmen to some person taken as a point of reference, often appear when a speaker talks, for example, of 'my sister'; yet, though 'ego' means 'I', he will be referred to by third-person pronouns such as 'him'. The distinction between 'ancestor' and 'ego' is not intended to deny that someone may be both ego and ancestor, as when someone speaks of 'my grandchildren'; here, however, the point is that the ancestor is dead – yet still significant because his descendants are a discrete group – whereas ego is a living person. The strategy was to translate terms for descendants into terms for collateral kin-groups, side branches of the tree of kinship. The translation was thus from lineal to collateral kinship. Instead of 'after-grandsons', *iarmui*, there was an 'after-kindred', *iārfine*; instead of 'end-grandsons', *indui*, an 'end-kindred', *indfine*. Taking these two as examples, the translation worked as in fig. 2.3.

As in (a) there are five generations inclusive from the ancestor to the *iarmui*, so in (b) there are five generations from ancestor B down to ego and his collaterals of the same generation. Similarly, as there are six generations from the ancestor down to the *indui* in (a), so in (b) there are six generations from ancestor A to ego and his collaterals of the same generation.

The *iārfine* is sometimes seen as including ego and his lineal ancestors; when, however, the context is that a line of descent has died out and its land is therefore going to pass to collateral kinsmen, the *iārfine* is simply

the collateral branch, recipients of shares in the land of their dead kinsmen. In the inclusive sense (including, therefore, ego's branch), the *íarfine* is the agnatic lineage that goes down as far as the *íarmui*. The *indfine* was one generation deeper, a lineage extending for six generations down to the *indui*. The two lineages are thus alike except that the *íarfine* is shallower by one generation than the *indfine*. (Shallowness or depth is a matter of the number of generations within a lineage counting from the common ancestor to the current generation).

After-grandsons were evidently so called because they came after grandsons; end-grandsons must have marked a limit of recognised kinship, a limit also marked by the *indfine*. Both after-grandsons and end-grandsons follow the grandsons, *auí*, in the line of descent. The *fine*, 'kindred', which corresponded to the *auí* was the *derbfine*, 'certain-kindred'. This comprised a common ancestor's agnatic descendants down to the fourth generation; that is, the second generation of *auí* (up to c. 700 *aue* included both what we would call a grandson and a great-grandson; subsequently it referred only to the grandson, apart from being a general term for descendants). Together with the ancestor himself, the *derbfine* thus included his *maic* and his *auí*, all the descendants whose designations are not derived from others, as the term *íarmui* 'after-grandsons' was derived from *auí* 'grandsons'. It is also notable that the commonest designation of a lineage in Old Irish is of the form *Auí Choirpri* or *Auí Echdach*, later *Uí Choirpri*, *Uí Echdach*. The likelihood is that this reflects the way the certain-kindred, the *derbfine*, comprised the *auí* of a given ancestor. Although *auí* in such names usually has the wider but secondary sense of 'descendants', the initial application of such names as *Auí Choirpri* may well have been to the *derbfine*. In some sense, therefore, the *derbfine* appears to have been the primary kindred as against the after-kindred and the end-kindred.

The general implications of this analysis of the way the Irish looked at kinship are, first, that lineal kinship – descent from an ancestor – was the basis of their view of kinship, collateral kinship being derived from lineal kinship; secondly, that the primary kindred was the shallow agnatic lineage of four generations, the *derbfine*, and that this was supplemented by two further lineages, each deeper by one generation, the *íarfine* of five generations and the *indfine* of six. After c. 700 this scheme was modified to include a still shallower lineage, the *gelfine*, 'white kindred', of three generations. It then supplanted the *derbfine* for most purposes as the primary kindred. As a corollary of this change *aue*

came to mean just ‘grandson’ and ceased to be employed also for the great-grandson.⁶⁰

Agnatic kinship was, first and foremost, the kinship of inheritance. The normal inheritance of land worked according to straightforward principles; only exceptional cases remain unclear. Where there were sons, they shared the land of their father equally according to the procedure expressed in the maxim ‘The youngest divides, the eldest chooses’. In this way, the one who partitioned the land received the last share, and it was thus in his interest to make the division as equitable as possible.⁶¹ The paternal house and farm-buildings appear to have gone to the eldest son by virtue of his expected role as public representative on behalf of his brothers.⁶² Daughters shared in movable goods but not normally in land. If, however, a man had only daughters, they received a life-share in the land; such a daughter was a *banchomarbhae*, a ‘female heir’. Except in special circumstances the inherited land of *banchomarbhae* did not subsequently pass to the sons of the daughters, because the sons belonged to other kindreds, those of their fathers. In order to avoid the land passing outside the kindred, the daughters’ possession – and through them that of their husbands – was made conditional on a contractual promise that the land would be restored to the daughters’ natal kindred.

After the daughters’ lifetime, therefore, the land passed to collateral kin just as if the father had had no children at all. In both cases, as far as the agnatic descent from father to son was concerned, the line had come to an end. The inheritance then passed to the remaining branches within the close kindred, the *derbfine* up to c. 700, the *gelfine* thereafter. It was apparently then shared ‘according to the number of branches’.⁶³ If we invert the diagram showing a *derbfine* to make it resemble a tree, we can see what may have happened in one particular case (see fig. 2.4). Within each branch, kinsmen shared *per capita*.

This situation will have been quite common, since it obtained, with

⁶⁰ The theory that the *gelfine* was a new kinship group c. 700 has not found universal acceptance (see for example, C. Etchingham, ‘Early Medieval Irish History’, in K. McCone and K. Simms, eds., *Progress in Medieval Irish Studies*, Maynooth, 1996, p. 141), but it still seems to me to fit the evidence better than any alternative yet proposed.

⁶¹ A late Old Irish text says that the eldest son takes the *les*, farm-enclosure or ringfort, the buildings and the *airlise* ‘area surrounding the *les*’, which belonged to his father: *CIH* 575.14. The implication, in the context, is that this happened before the partitioning of the lands began. The younger sons, because they would probably be obliged to establish new farm-buildings, would thereby have somewhat smaller holdings.

⁶² *CIH* 575.13–19 (the text is probably of the ninth century).

⁶³ *CIH* 911.27–8; *EIWK*, p. 71.

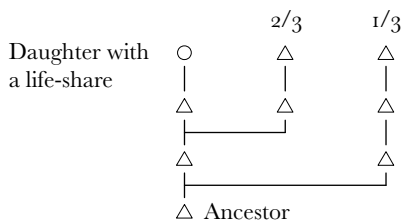


Fig. 2.4. Collateral inheritance

slight variations, both when a man was childless and when he only had daughters.⁶⁴ Less common was the extinction of an entire *derbfine* (or, later, *gelfine*). In that case, the lands of the extinct *derbfine* passed to the *íarfine* and the *indfine* in the proportion $\frac{3}{4}:\frac{1}{4}$. Beyond the *indfine*, rights of inheritance came to an end. In that sense, the 'end-kindred' was indeed the limit, because it was the last to have rights of inheritance, not because more remote connections were never recognised for other purposes. All these claims of collateral inheritance were based upon common descent, shared with the dead man or woman, by which their branches stemmed from the same trunk, *bun*, and they thus possessed the same origin, *bunad*. Yet, if such common descent led back to an ancestor to whom the claimant or the dead person was more remote than an 'end-grandson', it was of no validity. Beyond the 'end-kindred' was only the 'dark-kin', the *dubfine*.

Although standard inheritance was by partition among the sons at the death of the father, there was a further function of the *derbfine* whereby it was possible, within and only within its limits, to demand a resharing in each generation.⁶⁵ This enabled the grandsons or the great-grandsons to reshare the lands of their ancestor. The effect was to prevent, within the *derbfine*, the emergence of a major disparity of landed possessions arising out of one branch having more sons than another, as in some extreme cases (fig. 2.5).

True, this only affected inherited land, land which had passed down along the line of agnatic descent. A portion of the land which someone acquired by other means than inheritance could be granted outside the kindred, could be given to daughters, and was almost certainly immune from any claim to resharing; the rest of the acquired land, however, had

⁶⁴ J. Goody, *Production and Reproduction: A Comparative Study of the Domestic Domain* (Cambridge, 1976), Appendix 2, illustrates the probability of various family distributions. ⁶⁵ *EIWK*, pp. 64–70.

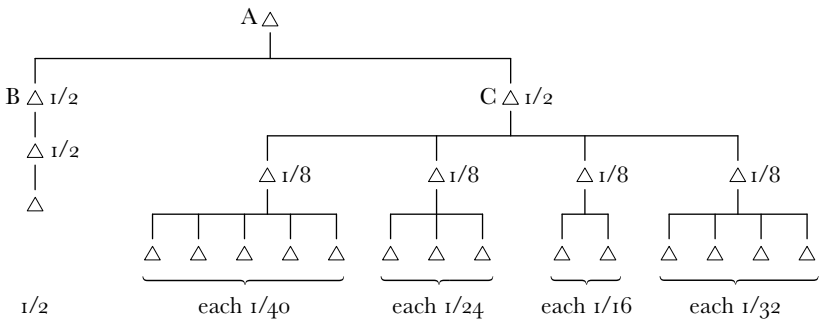


Fig. 2.5. The problem of resharing

to remain within the kindred.⁶⁶ Nonetheless the sons and grandsons of C in fig. 2.5 would have had a strong interest in demanding a resharing of the lands that had passed down to them from their ancestor A, and there would probably be similar claims to a resharing of the lands of C. The limits of resharing, being confined within the *derbfine*, were marked by the term *auí*, while the limits of collateral inheritance, as we have seen, were marked by the terms *induí* and *indfíne*. Resharing was always done one generation at a time. In order, therefore, to prevent the procedure from being rendered impracticable by the different ages and life-expectancies of kinsmen of the same generation, it was the rule that sons could step into the shoes of a dead father. If, in fig. 2.5, C were to die before A, C's sons would share together with B as if they had been C himself, and so would receive $\frac{1}{8}$ each; they might subsequently, in their own right, carry out a resharing with B's son, whereupon all of them would end up with $\frac{1}{5}$. This rule of representation, by which sons could act in the place of a dead father, applied throughout the inheriting kindred.

Resharing among kinsmen applied to land, not to movables. Moreover, it probably only operated to bring the disadvantaged kinsman's inherited holding up to the size that sustained the status of a *bóaire*. Yet the mixed farming and the correspondingly mixed diet of the Irish required a balance of land and livestock. This was probably one of the forces which made clientship a central institution in early Irish society. The main tract on base clientship, *Cáin Aicillne*, expresses a clear preference for choosing a kinsman as one's lord. As we have seen, base

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 67–8.

clientship was usually initiated by a grant of livestock by the lord to the client. What resharing did for land, therefore, clientship did for livestock, but with this crucial difference, that resharing of land affirmed the capacity of the kindred to see that its members were at least *bóairig*, while the grant of livestock in base clientship was, ultimately, what made the lord a noble and the client a commoner.

The inheritance of office worked according to different rules. Kingship, for example, although sometimes shared by two men, occasionally even by three, was normally held by one man at a time. The same was true of the headship of a church. For this reason inheritance of office needs to be distinguished from inheritance of status, since the latter could usually pass down to an indefinite number of people. Yet these two elements in an individual's social position, rank and office, are not always kept separate in the texts, probably with good reason, for there seems to have been a close relationship between the two. To take only one example, the headship of a noble kindred may be treated as an office; yet, for *Críth Gablach*, it is also one of the ranks of nobility.⁶⁷

The way in which the legal texts related status to office was in terms of potentiality versus actuality. A man needed to be a potential king before he could compete for the office itself; and to be a potential king a man needed to be descended from a king who was no more remote than his grandfather. To be a potential king in this sense gave a man status in that he remained a full member of a royal kindred and his branch of that kindred retained royal status. To have more kings in one's line of descent gave one an added claim. The legendary king of Tara, Conaire Mór, claimed that both his father and his grandfather had been kings of Tara, and thus, although he was being criticised as too young to be king, none the less his claim was the strongest.⁶⁸ It is a delicious aspect of his career that he made this claim just after he had discovered that he was not in fact the son of his supposed father;⁶⁹ the audience, however, were not privy to this information and his argument carried the day. An historical example is the alternation in the kingship of Tara between the Cland Cholmáin kings of Mide and Cenél nEogain. From the middle years of the eighth century each generation produced its king; the usual pattern was for a man's father to be his predecessor but one. This alternation in the kingship of Tara also gave an immense advantage to the claims of the successful lines of descent within their own kingdoms of Mide and

⁶⁷ *Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchy, § 27, lines 386–416.

⁶⁸ *Tógail Buidne Da Derga*, ed. E. Knott, Medieval and Modern Irish Series 8 (Dublin, 1936), § 15, lines 162–4.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, lines 145–8 (cf. 91–7).

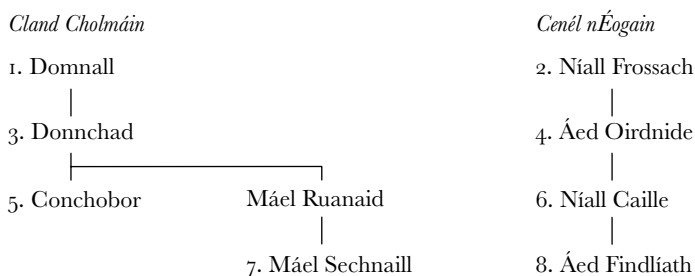


Fig. 2.6. Alternation and father-son succession to the kingdom of Tara

Cenél nÉogain. Alternation between different branches of the Uí Néill prevented alternation within those branches: in Cland Cholmáin and Cenél nÉogain direct father-son succession became the norm (fig. 2.6).

Descent, therefore, had two distinct roles in the inheritance of royal office: if either a man's father or grandfather had been king, he was a possible candidate; but the man who came of an unbroken line of kings had the stronger claim. In his case, descent became one element in his *febas*, his personal excellence, not just an initial genealogical qualification.

Succession to the kingship may be divided into three stages. First, there was the bare genealogical qualification that defined the initial pool of candidates. Secondly, there was the *febas*, personal excellence, which made a man a serious candidate, a man thought worthy to be king. He was termed 'the material of a king', *damnae rí* (also *adbar rí*), or 'royal material', *rígdamnae*. A man who was 'material of a king' did not always succeed in becoming king. That was settled in the third stage, a direct political competition between the leading candidates. Yet, even if someone recognised as *damnae rí* did not become king, he might have safeguarded the continued royal character of his branch of the kindred. Although the legal fragments suggest that becoming king was what mattered, there is good annalistic evidence of a branch of Cenél nÉogain sustaining its claims by having a series of *rígdamnai*, even though none of them became king.⁷⁰ Moreover, there are good reasons within the legal material why this should have been so.

The laws governing succession to high office are a statement of three types of qualification: those required of all candidates; those which enhance an existing claim; and finally those which act as tie-breakers,

⁷⁰ *EIWK*, pp. 108–10.

deciding between two or more equally matched candidates. Two tie-breakers are mentioned: seniority and the principle of ‘a circuit around the branches of a kindred’, that is to say, the advantage to be gained, other things being equal, from giving the office to a branch other than the one that had held it in the immediate past. If, then, the issue was settled by means of such a tie-breaker, that implied that the remaining candidates were of equal *febas*. In such a situation it was evidently appropriate that the branch to which the defeated candidate belonged should have its *febas*, *qua* branch of the royal kindred, upheld by the acknowledged worth of its candidate.

Kinship in one form or another was important at all stages of royal succession: it was crucial in determining the initial pool of candidates, important as a constituent of *febas*, and finally it provided one of the tie-breakers. Yet the kinship involved in royal succession was fundamentally different from the kinship governing the inheritance of land. In the latter case, the virtues of cooperation were of paramount importance. One lawtract contains a section proclaiming the desired cohesiveness of the kindred and its character as a single body with a single head.⁷¹ The individual kinsman is here judged by his contribution to the health of this social body, the kindred. But when the context is royal succession, the required virtues are different. Now the qualities demanded are those which enable one man to excel another. Instead of the virtues of cooperation, what count are the virtues of competition. Even when it was a question of an individual helping to uphold the *febas* of his branch of the royal kindred, what was at issue was the competition between the branches. In this sphere the very concept of *febas* was essentially one of competitive excellence.

The inheritance of status is an intermediate case between the inheritance of land and the inheritance of office. The general principle was that it took three generations to raise oneself to a higher rank, and likewise three generations to lose that rank. This principle, often denoted by the phrase *sáegul triúr*, ‘lifetime of three men’, was also used in deciding royal succession: as we have seen, someone whose father and grandfather had been king had a strong claim on account of *cenél*, ‘descent’. The use of the principle is well illustrated by the case of the aspirant to nobility. The grounds for claiming noble rank are that someone is a lord of base clients – clients who owe fixed annual food-renders. Lordship thus confers nobility; or, rather, it does so after three generations:⁷²

⁷¹ *Cáin Aicillne*, ed. Thurneysen, §§ 30–1.

⁷² *Cáin Sóerráith*, § 4, ed. R. Thurneysen, *ZCP*, 15 (1924), 245.

There is a variety of fiefs and lords: that is, the lord who is only entitled to butter and seed[-corn?] and live cattle, [namely] the commoner lord whose father is not a lord; the lord of ale and of boiled salted meat . . . the lord of red meat and of meat not yet salted – he is the lord according to proper descent of father and grandfather, who is entitled to requisitions as well as other rights.

According to *Críth Gablach*, someone whose descent was not lordly needed to have double the normal number of base clients before he could be reckoned to be a noble.⁷³ Lordship of base clients was accepted as the basis of nobility, but to have its proper effect it needed to be old inherited lordship.

The corresponding principle was that it took three generations before a rank was definitively lost. If a line of descent within a kindred of poets had not had a properly educated poet for three generations, it lost its poetic status;⁷⁴ if a line of descent within a royal lineage had not had a king for three generations, it ceased to be potentially royal.⁷⁵ The term *cenél* thus covers a range of interlocking ideas: it is the kindred, and likewise the descent by which someone possesses an old and inherited status. In this way the sphere of lordship – on the whole straightforwardly economic in conception – was brought into harmony with the sphere of kinship.

The way in which descent confers status is not the only link between kinship and rank. So far, what has mattered has solely been agnatic descent: the rank and position of father and grandfather. High rank could also be sustained, however, by maternal kinship. A passage in the Leinster genealogies sets out the ancestors of Muiredach, himself the eponymous ancestor of the Uí Muiredaig, one of the three branches of the great tree of the Uí Dúnlainge, the leading royal dynasty of Leinster from the eighth to the eleventh century:

The mother of Muiredach mac Murchada was Conchenn daughter of Cellach of Cúalu, the son of Gerthide. The mother of Conchenn, however, was the daughter of Failbe mac Domnaill meic Cormaic meic Diarmata of the Uí Bairrche; she was called Mugain. Eithne daughter of Crundmáel mac Rónáin, that is the daughter of the king of Laigin Desgabair, was the mother of Mugain. Failend daughter of Suibne mac Colmáin meic Cobthaig of the Déssi Muman was the mother of the aforementioned Eithne.⁷⁶

The resulting genealogy is shown in fig. 2.7.

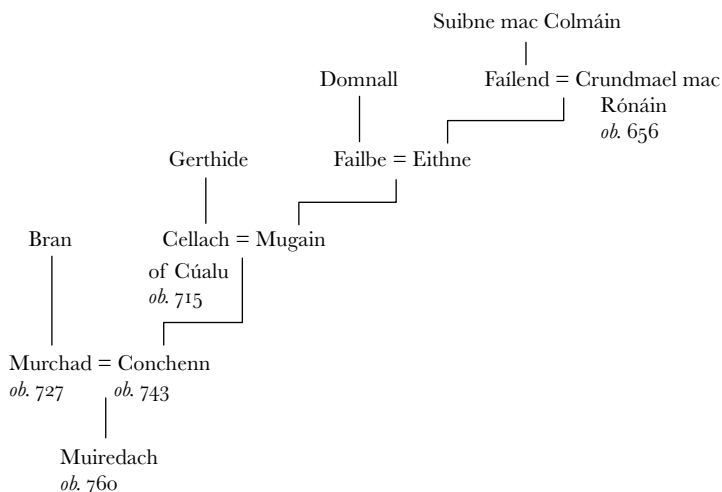
A matrilineal line of descent (W–X–Y–Z) acts as a base to which

⁷³ *Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchy, § 19, lines 256–61.

⁷⁴ *Uraicecht na Ríar*, ed. Breatnach, § 7, pp. 106–7, and see the discussion, pp. 94–6.

⁷⁵ *CIH* 1291.32–4; *EIWK*, p. 98. ⁷⁶ *CGH* i.340 (LL 316 a 49–59).

UÍ DÚNLAINGE UÍ MÁIL UÍ BAIRRCHE DÉSSI MUMAN UÍ CHENSELAIG



The structure of this genealogy is as follows:

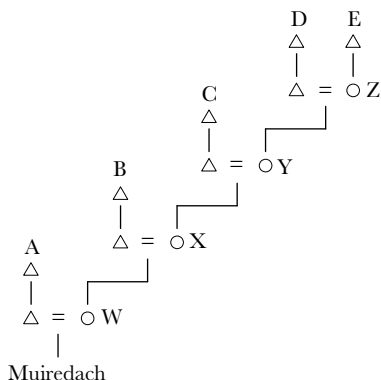


Fig 2.7. The ancestresses of Muiredach

patriline (A, B, C, D and E) are attached. What the matriline does, therefore, is to connect agnatic lineages allied by marriage and the birth of children. The most highly recommended form of marriage was an alliance between persons of equal inherited status, *comchenúil*, 'of equal kindred'. A marriage was, therefore, not just a potential alliance, but also a demonstration of the rank of the kindreds involved.

Kinship through women, therefore, was a crucial aspect of *febas*, the personal standing which sustained a man's claim to high office. As marriages demonstrated status so, for the same reason, did maternal descent. A Leinster poet praised his patron, Áed mac Díarmata, a descendant of the Muiredach whose high maternal descent was shown by the genealogy just discussed, by saying that he was 'of the children of a hundred kings and a hundred queens'.⁷⁷ This claim makes sense of the boast in an Old Irish poem about a seventh-century bishop of Kildare, Áed Dub, a member of the then up-and-coming lineage of the Uí Dúnlainge, who were to rule Leinster from the eighth to the eleventh century. The poem is put into the mouth of the bishop, himself the brother of a king of Leinster, Fáelán mac Colmáin, and addresses some rival, real or imagined:⁷⁸

Are your horns horns of buffalo?
 Are your ales the ale of Cúalu?⁷⁹
 Is your land the Curragh of the plain of Liffey?
 Are you the descendant of a hundred high-kings?
 Is your church Kildare?
 Do you keep house with Christ?

Even someone so proud as the bishop of Kildare could only claim to be the descendant of a hundred high-kings by combining both maternal and paternal descent. Genealogical links through women also created alliances, as illustrated by the genealogy of Cú Chulainn given above. What mattered in terms of his rights of inheritance in his native territory, Mag Muirthemne in Co. Louth, was his paternity, but what mattered in terms of his wider political connections in the province of Ulster was his relationship through his mother to Conchobor, the king.

In high politics close agnatic kinsmen were much less natural allies than were relations through women (such as Conchobor or Conall Cernach to Cú Chulainn) or foster-brothers (again such as Conall Cernach to Cú Chulainn). Close agnatic kinsmen were expected to be rivals in the competition to succeed as king; maternal relatives and

⁷⁷ *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus*, ed. and tr. W. Stokes and J. Strachan (Cambridge, 1903–5; repr. Dublin, 1975), ii.295.

⁷⁸ *CGH* i.339, and ed. K. Meyer, 'Áed Dub mac Colmáin, Bishop-Abbot of Kildare', *ŽCP*, 9 (1913), 458–60.

⁷⁹ The ale of Cúalu was one of 'the ales of sovereignty' and a metaphor (*via* the ale that was the perquisite of a lord) for kingship: *Scéla Cano meic Gartnáin*, ed. D. A. Binchy, *Medieval and Modern Irish Series*, 18 (Dublin, 1963), lines 452–3, where the point of saying that no one will be king of Ireland who has not drunk the ales of Cúalu is that kingship of Ireland depended especially on subjecting the Leinstermen.

foster-kin were not rivals, but rather the very people to whom a contestant would most naturally turn for support. At this high social level early Irish kinship embodies an interesting paradox: those who, because they were close kin, shared the same rights of inheritance as one did oneself were one's natural rivals; those whose kinship was ineffective in determining to which lineage a man belonged – whether because it was through females or because it was the created kinship of fosterage – were for that very reason more reliable allies.⁸⁰ In a similar way, the branch of a royal kindred which accepted that it was out of the competition would then become a natural ally of the remaining competitors. It was for this reason, perhaps, that the Tripartite Life of St Patrick portrayed the branch of the Uí Néill known as Cenél Maini, rulers of Southern Tethbae, as king-makers extraordinary: not one of their number was ever king of Tara.⁸¹

(b) *Gens*

What may be a special form of kindred is described by Adomnán in his Life of Columba by means of the Latin word *gens*.⁸² Irish equivalents of *gens* are *corcu*, *dál*, and, in compounds, *rige*.⁸³ Men are ascribed to a *gens* by means of a word that may be termed a gentilic, *moccu*, *mocu* or *maccu*; for women the counterpart is *dercu*.⁸⁴ *Moccu* and *dercu* appear to contain words for 'son' and 'daughter', *macc* and *der/dar*, together with a further element.⁸⁵ In Adomnán's Life of Columba and in the ogam inscriptions it is rare for anyone given a gentilic to be also identified as the grandson or descendant of so-and-so. Since one Latin word used by Adomnán for the group of *auí* of so-and-so is *parentela*, the phrase '*aué* of so-and-so' is conveniently called a parentelic. We thus have two modes of personal identification: the gentilic X *moccu* Y and the parentelic X *aué* Y.

A *parentela* is unambiguously a kindred of the kind defined by common

⁸⁰ The *fer cuithernsa*, 'man of joint-lordship', of CIH 45.3, who is not entitled to give evidence in public, is explained in the gloss as 'the man who is in "joint-lordship" with you, disputing kingship or abbacy'.

⁸¹ See above, pp. 34–5; another possibility is that Cenél Maini was not, originally, a branch of the Uí Néill: Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, p. 92. ⁸² *EIWK*, pp. 141–5.

⁸³ The basis for this topic remains the work of E. Mac Neill, 'Mocu, Maccu', *Ériu*, 3 (1907), 42–9, and 'Early Irish Population-Groups: Their Nomenclature, Classification and Chronology', *PRLA*, 29 c (1911), 59–114.

⁸⁴ F. J. Byrne, 'Dercu: The Feminine of Mocu', *Éigse*, 28 (1994–5), 42–70.

⁸⁵ Byrne, *ibid.*, 42, suggests **duchtir* + *mucoi* and **maggas* + *mucoi*; cf. D. McManus, *A Guide to Ogam*, Maynooth Monographs, 4 (Maynooth, 1991), pp. 119–20, 180 n. 69 (which, however, predates Byrne's important discovery).

descent in the male line, an agnatic lineage or patrilineage; it may be translated by 'lineage'. The nature of the *gens* is, however, much more obscure. Adomnán, as we have seen, distinguishes his *gens* from *parentela* and also from *genus*, which he uses for Irish *cenél* 'kindred', a group of much the same nature as his *parentela*: the ruling kindred of the area around Oban in Argyll was Cenél Loairn (hence the modern district of Lorne), and Adomnán calls them the *genus Loerni*.⁸⁶ According to his usage and that of the inscriptions, a gentilic and a parentelic were rarely used together of the same person; this suggests that they were distinct but similar in function – distinct because they could, though seldom, be used together, and similar because they were normally alternative identifications employed in the same context. Another piece of evidence that gentilic and parentelic had similar functions is that Tírechán, writing at almost the same time as Adomnán, used the one word, *genus*, for both Adomnán's *gens* (= *corcu*, *dál* etc.) and his *genus* (= *cenél*): Tírechán, therefore, avoids distinguishing the two.

What makes it especially difficult to determine the nature of the *gens* is that it seems to have been in the process of either disappearing entirely or becoming fossilised. Adomnán and Tírechán belonged to the last generation for which it was natural to identify someone by means of a gentilic. In the laws, belonging mostly to the eighth rather than to the seventh century, the *gens* is barely mentioned. Some *gentes* remained – Cíarraige, 'Kerry', is an example – but no new ones emerged. The survivors were perceived as deep lineages, with nothing remarkable other than their depth, that is, the number of generations from common ancestor to living descendants.

Many *gentes* were linked with kingdoms and thus with the peoples, *túatha*, of those kingdoms. This has prompted the suggestion that the disappearance of the *gens* was part of a broader change, from a 'tribal' society to one dominated by dynasties and their characteristic politics. 'Tribe' has been used as a translation of Irish *túath*, 'people', so that the *rí túaithe* has been taken to be a 'tribal king'. By 'tribe' was meant a small-scale political unit characterised by an absence of bureaucratic government and therefore governed more by the management of existing social bonds than by specialised administrative agencies. In this sense 'tribe' is more or less what some German medievalists have called a *Personen-verbandstaat* as opposed to a territorial and bureaucratic state. The link between *gens* and this tribal *túath* or *plebs* is exemplified by such kingdoms

⁸⁶ Adomnán, *VSC* ii.45.

as Corcu Duibne (which gave its name to the Corkaguiney or Dingle peninsula). The numerous ogam inscriptions of this area include several ascribing individuals to the ruling *gens*, for example:⁸⁷

MAQQI ERCCIAS MAQQI MUCOI DOVINIA
 ‘(the memorial of) Mac Ercae *moccu* Duibne’

Most inscriptions in the area, however, do not commemorate persons said to belong to Corcu Duibne. Since to belong among the ruling *gens* should have been an important characteristic of any individual, it may be presumed that such people did not belong to Corcu Duibne. The *gens* was thus distinct from the *túath* or *plebs*, even though the *gens* might give its name to the *túath*. Corcu Duibne appears to have been primarily the name of the ruling *gens* and, secondarily, of the *túath* (*plebs*) over which it ruled. This is what we should expect from Adomnán who distinguishes *gens* from *plebs* or *populus* (*túath*) and also, as we have seen, from *genus* (*cenél*) and *parentela* (*aicme* or *fine*). The linkage between *gens* and *túath* offers a possible clue to the nature of the *gens* itself. A branch of a royal lineage that did not produce a king for three generations lost royal status. The same was true for poets (*filid*), and it may have been a general rule for lineages of high status. An ordinary lineage (*parentela*) restricted its size by depth; a *derbfine* was no more than four generations deep and it thus split (‘segmented’) with the coming of another generation. A royal lineage could have restricted its size by the principle that those who were no longer royal – no longer in a branch that produced kings – were no longer of the same group. A *gens* plainly did not segment in the way an ordinary *derbfine* did; otherwise the Corcu Duibne, which appears to have been the ruling group of the Corkaguiney peninsula in the fifth century, would not have been still there in the ninth century. The enduring presence of Corcu Duibne, would, however, be entirely explicable if the ruling group, that is Corcu Duibne, shed branches as they lost royal status rather than itself segmenting as the generations passed.

The suggestion that the *gens* was a ruling lineage that shed branches as they lost status cannot be a full explanation. Admittedly, since the same principle of loss of status after three generations also applied to poets and probably also to nobles, there could be *gentes* that were not royal. Yet it is a more complex issue than the single example of the Corcu Duibne suggests. Even in the Corkaguiney peninsula there were *gentes* other than Corcu Duibne.⁸⁸ These might have been characterised by

⁸⁷ CIIC no. 175 (original provenance unknown).

⁸⁸ CIIC nos. 138, 195 (but the crucial part of the latter is not now visible: McManus, *A Guide to Ogam*, p. 65).

their high status, but there were also *aithechthúatha*, ‘base-peoples’, whose names were frequently of the *gens* type. A possible, but perhaps only partial, answer is that such base *gentes* were base only in the sense that the kingdoms over which they ruled (or had ruled in the past) were compelled to pay tribute. The political status of the whole kingdom would not prevent its ruling kindred shedding branches that lost status just like any other *gens*.

Dál nAraidi and the Fothairt offer complex but instructive cases. By 700, as we have seen, there were at least two ruling lineages within Dál nAraidi: the Uí Echach ruled Mag Cobo (west Co. Down), while the Uí Chóelbad ruled two known kingdoms, Mag Line on the eastern side of Lough Neagh and Eilne between the Bann and the Bush. (The ascription to Dál nAraidi of the Latharnae, around Larne, and the Uí Dercu Chéin, perhaps in the Laggan valley, is more doubtful.) Dál nAraidi thus ruled at least three *túatha*. But it was also the *gens* of St Comgall, founder and patron saint of the great monastery of Bangor, close to the frontier between the Cruithni and the Ulaid. Bangor lay outside all three kingdoms known to be ruled by Dál nAraidi. In 700, therefore, Dál nAraidi transcended the limits of any one *túath* and enjoyed a high status upheld by churchmen as well as by kings. By 800 the name Dál nAraidi would come to be applied to all the Cruithni, and hence would lose its special significance.

The Fothairt were mainly situated in Leinster: Fothairt Fea and Fothairt Maige Ítha were distinct kingdoms of the *túath* type; but they also included the Fothairt Airbrech, who lived within the kingdom of Uí Fáilgi and were perhaps not of sufficient political standing to be counted as a kingdom in their own right; they also included the Fothairt Airthir Lifi who were almost certainly not of royal standing. Outside Leinster they were established close to Armagh within the people known as the Airthir, ‘the Easterners’, but only as a small local group, not as a distinct kingdom. The name ‘Fothairt’ is not of the *gens* type; instead it falls into the same category as such standard ‘tribal’ names as Ulaid in Ireland or Brigantes in Britain (and earlier also in Ireland). Yet within the people, the Fothairt, there was a *gens*, Dál nEchdach.⁸⁹ Brigit belonged to the Fothairt and her pedigree traced her descent from the Eochaid who gave his name to Dál nEchdach; yet she was a slave by birth – even though her father was noble – simply because her mother was a slave. It is quite unclear whether Brigit would have been seen as belonging to Dál

⁸⁹ *Vita S. Fintani de Cluain Edlnech*, c. 1 (ed. Heist, *Vitae*, p. 145), describes Fintan as ‘maccu Echdach’ – *sic leg.*, cf. c. 3).

nEchdach even while she was still a slave; perhaps such recognition could only come when she was freed.

The *gens*, therefore, was probably some form of kindred, but its nature remains uncertain. This uncertainty, in its turn, makes it difficult to say whether its disappearance or fossilisation *c.* 700 was part of a larger change from a tribal to a dynastic polity.

(c) *Neighbours*

A second type of community was the group of neighbours.⁹⁰ Irish law saw this group as a consequence of kinship: men partitioned the lands of their ancestors and thus created in the distribution of their lands an expression of their kinship. Neighbours formed a community similar to a kindred – one in which an individual found himself without a deliberate act, but from which he could remove himself. The lawtract on neighbourhood, *Bretha Comaithchesa*, declares:⁹¹ ‘A question: from where does neighbourhood emerge? From plurality of heirs.’ Although partible inheritance, left to itself, would create a mosaic of small parcels of land, resharing would allow rationalisation. Moreover, collateral inheritance of the lands of an extinct branch would permit the reuniting of parcels previously separated. Both resharing and collateral inheritance operated within the kindred as a whole – *derbfine* and *indfine* respectively. They would not change the fundamental point made by *Bretha Comaithchesa* that partible inheritance was the most obvious agent for creating groups of neighbours.

Yet such groups were also created by a deliberate legal act. It is therefore necessary to distinguish between *de facto* and *de iure* neighbourhood, between simple proximity of lands and a special legal regime entered into by neighbours in order to facilitate harmonious relations. The story told by *Bretha Comaithchesa* proceeds from partitioning of lands to the arrangements made to set up the special legal regime known as ‘neighbourhood’, *comaithches*. It may start with kinsmen, but it does not remain a mere expression of kinship, and kinsmen were not the only possible neighbours.

The regime was created by the giving of a special type of pledge, the *tairgille* or ‘forepledge’.⁹² It was given in advance by each participant to guarantee to the others that he would fence his land to a satisfactory standard and that he would pay fines for any trespasses committed by his

⁹⁰ Kelly, *Guide to Early Irish Law*, pp. 101–2, 142–6; *EIWK*, chap. 10. ⁹¹ *CIH* 64.18.

⁹² *Bechbretha*, ed. Charles-Edwards and Kelly, n. on § 1; Kelly, *Guide to Early Irish Law*, pp. 165–6.

animals across the fences he had constructed. This forepledge replaced the normal remedy available to anyone who suffered material injury at the hands of another: distraint of the other's cattle. Normally, the injured party would give a warning, and then, failing recompense, would take cattle belonging to the offending party to a private pound.⁹³ Within the regime of neighbourhood, the injured party could rely on the forepledge; he did not need to take the time and trouble required to distrain the other's cattle nor did the other have the inconvenience of having his cattle removed to the pound. The law therefore implied a distinction between simple *de facto* neighbours, who had to use distraint to seek remedies for harm to their lands,⁹⁴ and *de iure* neighbours who had established the legal regime known as neighbourhood, *comaitches*.

Although the term *comaithech*, 'neighbour', could be used for someone simply on the grounds of proximity of lands, it could also mean much more. The sense is literally 'joint-client' (client in the sense of the base client, who pays annual food-renders to his lord). The reason why a word meaning 'joint-render-payer' could be used for the neighbour is explained by *Bretha Comaitchesa*. In this special legal regime there were no distinctions of rank between noble and commoner: all freemen were on a level footing and gave forepledges and paid fines as if there were no difference of status between them. *Aithech*, 'render-payer, commoner, churl', was often a term suggesting the disdain felt by a noble for a clod-hopping peasant; yet, within the regime of neighbourhood, noble and peasant went clod-hopping on equal terms.⁹⁵

The equality required of neighbours is all the more remarkable because the law of neighbourhood was principally concerned with cattle and fenced pasture. Yet cattle were the aspect of farming in which the relationship of lord and client was crucial: cattle constituted the capital advanced by the lord to enable the client to farm properly. One might have supposed that the natural focus for any temporary equality between neighbours would have been the boundary between their arable, not the boundary between their pasture. Lord and client were much more equal as arable farmers than they were as cattle-farmers, for both possessed inherited land. The kinsmen, whose partitioned lands were thought to create the regime of neighbourhood, were also expected to collaborate in joint ploughing arrangements.⁹⁶ Yet, in *Bretha Comaitchesa* even the word *etham*, literally 'corn-grower' and thus properly a cornfield, is used

⁹³ Kelly, *Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 180.

⁹⁴ For example, *CIH* 75.24-7.

⁹⁵ *CIH* 64.8-9.

⁹⁶ *Cáin Lánama*, ed. and tr. R. Thurneysen in R. Thurneysen *et al.*, *Studies in Early Irish Law* (Dublin, 1936), § 5.

of a particular type of pasture left ungrazed until winter so as to provide 'fog', grass not cut to make hay but left uncut in the field.⁹⁷

The explanation of this preoccupation with pasture may be that most arable was not normally fenced. As in the open fields of northern France or midland England, arable appears to have consisted, at least in some parts of the country, of strips often lying intermingled with the arable strips of other men.⁹⁸ If such arable was grazed after harvest, it was probably by means of *comingaire*, 'joint-herding'.⁹⁹ This was a custom by which a joint herd was entrusted to a succession of herdsmen according to a rota made up of those who had contributed cattle to the herd. Whereas ordinary pasture was fenced and thus each man's animals were kept separate, joint-herding allowed for the exploitation of unfenced pasture.

(d) *Túath*

Unfenced common pasture was one of the perquisites of the third opt-out community, the *túath*, the lay people of a small kingdom.¹⁰⁰ The *túath* usually, but not always, inhabited a single distinct territory; this was often a *mag*, an area of open cultivated land as opposed to mountain, forest or bog; so, for example, Mag Cerai, the territory of the Fir Cherai; Mag nÍtha Fothart, the territory of the Fothairt Maige Ítha. Many *túatha* would also have possessed areas of commonland. The practice of leaving areas of pasture open to all the animals of the *túath* has left its trace in modern place-names. The names Shelmaliure Commons, Forth Commons and Bargy Commons on Forth Mountain in Co. Wexford (five miles wsw of Wexford) preserve the memory of three small kingdoms: the first ruled by a branch of the Uí Chennselaig, Síl Máeluidir, the second one of the territories of the Fothairt (those of Mag nÍtha), and the third ruled by a branch of another major Leinster dynasty, Uí Bairrche.¹⁰¹ Mountain or bogland was often exploited by the practice known as transhumance: livestock were pastured on the harsher land between 1 May and 1 November, the feasts of Beltaine and Samain respectively, leaving the better land to sustain them during the winter and spring.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ *CIH* 66.36; 70.4.

⁹⁸ *EIWK*, pp. 418–19; cf. the *immaire*, literally 'that which one ploughs round', a word for a ridge of arable produced by ploughing up one side of a strip and down the other; the term was then used as a rough equivalent to 'acre'. ⁹⁹ *CIH* 576.24–577.24. ¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 579.6–8.

¹⁰¹ Grid ref.: s 98 19.

¹⁰² Kelly, *Early Irish Farming*, pp. 43–6; P. Mac Cana, *Celtic Mythology* (London, 1970), pp. 126–7.

One aspect of the *túath*, therefore, is as a farming community embracing numerous groups of neighbours. As it was a farming community, its members were ranked according to their wealth in land, cattle and, for the nobles, clients. Within the bounds of the *túath*, yet not wholly of it, were those whose rank derived from skill in craft, from learning, or from their position in the Church. The reason why the *túath* was contrasted with the Church especially, but also with the poets, was the ability of both churchmen and poets to move beyond the bounds of any one kingdom. A priest was still a priest and enjoyed the status of a priest when he left the kingdom of his parents. This explains why religious *peregrinatio* – becoming a foreigner by leaving one's native kingdom – was a more ascetic action if the *peregrinus* left Ireland than if he merely moved from one Irish kingdom to another.¹⁰³ Ireland was a cohesive unit because its inhabitants spoke one language, Irish; therefore those whose living came from a skill with words and from knowledge – poets and storytellers – could practise their craft throughout the entire island and also in the lands settled by the Irish in Britain. Farmers, however, were naturally tied to the small kingdom in which their lands lay. For that reason, the *túath* was preeminently a community of farmers.

For a layman it was dishonourable to leave his native kingdom to marry and to settle in the native kingdom of his wife. By migrating the man accepted that he was going to live on the land of his wife. For that reason a migration of this kind seems to have been commonest when the woman was a *banchomarbae*, 'female heir'.¹⁰⁴ Such a man was not an independent legal agent: his wife had the greater power to make contractual arrangements and the husband was not, therefore, the head of the household and did not have ultimate control of any section of the farm.¹⁰⁵ Even the legendary king of Ulster, Fergus mac Roí, had his honour besmirched by men recalling that he had accepted exile for the love of a woman: he had 'pursued a woman's loins across a frontier'.¹⁰⁶ This was in spite of the stories which told of how he was tricked out of his kingdom by Conchobor mac Nessa, and of how he went into exile among Ulster's enemies when men he had sworn to protect were killed in violation of his honour.¹⁰⁷ However imperative the reason for his exile, the truth remained that Fergus was a man of notorious sexual capacity,

¹⁰³ Charles-Edwards, 'The Social Background to Irish *Peregrinatio*', 43–59.

¹⁰⁴ See above p. 87.

¹⁰⁵ *Cáin Lánamna*, ed. Thurneysen, § 29; *Fuaidir* Tract, § 4, ed. Thurneysen, *Irishes Recht*, p. 64.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 64; cf. *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, ed. O'Rahilly, lines 4068–9.

¹⁰⁷ *Aided Fergusa*, ed. and tr. K. Meyer, *The Death-Tales of the Ulster Heroes* (Dublin, 1906), p. 32; *Longes mac n-Uislenn*, ed. V. Hull (New York, 1949), pp. 47–8, §§ 13–16.

and his appetites could not in the end be reconciled with his reputation or even his life: he would die as a result of coupling in public in the sight of his paramour's husband.¹⁰⁸ If Fergus's honour was threatened by migration, so too was the honour of lesser men: they too were thought to have abandoned the kingdom of their forefathers – where their kinsmen lay in the ancestral cemetery – for sex.¹⁰⁹

There were not the same objections to women marrying outside their *túath*. At the level of kings, indeed, marriage across the boundaries of a kingdom was normal and is likely to have been a significant element in the making and buttressing of alliances.¹¹⁰ Although there is no direct evidence, it remains likely that such marriages also occurred at least among the nobility when their *túatha* were joined by the alliance known as a *cairde*: the young adults of Síl Máeluidir, Fothairt Mara and Uí Bairrche, with their summer pastures lying side by side on Forth Mountain, would have found many opportunities to contract cross-boundary liaisons; periodic 'fairs', *óenaige*, would have provided more. As a result of cross-boundary marriages, many would have had kinsmen in another *túath*.¹¹¹ Both marriage and fosterage are likely to have brought allied *túatha* into closer association. The *túath* was thus far from being an isolated political unit, combining together with other *túatha* only by means of the personal allegiance of a client-king to his overlord.

There is, however, a sense in which the *túath* at the level of whole peoples corresponded to the agnatic lineage in kinship. Membership of both depended primarily upon descent in the male line; the exceptions to this rule were largely identical in the two cases, namely when a man went to live with a wife from another *túath*.¹¹² A man was tied to a *túath* as to a lineage by the lands which he inherited; a woman, not normally inheriting land, was correspondingly less firmly attached to the *túath* just as she was less firmly attached to the lineage. A man who acquired land within the boundary of a *túath* to which he did not belong by descent could be adopted into that *túath* just as he might be adopted into a kindred. Possession of land and the prospect of handing it on to descendants gave him roots. Moreover, it seems to be assumed that such a man would not have land elsewhere and would not, therefore, be a native of more than one kingdom. A man, unless he was a monk, would expect to

¹⁰⁸ *Aided Fergus*, ed. Meyer, pp. 32–4.

¹⁰⁹ *CIH* 427.4–5 = *Fuidir* Tract, § 4, ed. Thurneysen, *Irishes Recht*, p. 64.

¹¹⁰ See above, p. 94.

¹¹¹ *CIH* 48.31 cites 'seeking kinsmen across a frontier' as one of the reasons why a married person was entitled to leave the marital home (temporarily, according to the gloss).

¹¹² Kelly, *Early Irish Farming*, p. 424, cites *CIH* 1640.18, showing that a *deorad* who bought land in a *túath* became an *aurrad*.

be buried in the cemetery where his ancestors lay, and thus among his own people; the same was true of an unmarried woman and probably of a widow, but a woman who predeceased her husband was likely to be buried in his ancestral cemetery.¹¹³ If she married a man from another *túath*, that would entail accepting the possibility that she would be buried outside her own people. A *túath*, like a lineage and like the Church, was a community of the dead as much as of the living.

A *túath* was also a sphere of life, the domain of public acts. A nobleman was entitled to receive hospitality together with a larger company when he was *i túaith*, 'among a people', that is acting in a public role. When he was *fo leith*, 'on the side', 'on private business', he was expected to bring a smaller company. In this sense of 'the public domain', the *túath* is contrasted with the household. A father who allowed his son to take service with another in order to learn a craft or for the sake of farming was said to 'release him among a people'.¹¹⁴ The distinction between private and public was matched by strong laws to protect privacy. A commoner was entitled to his honour-price, 'the value of his face', when someone entered his *les*, the enclosure around his house and farm-buildings, without permission. He was entitled to a milch-cow in compensation when someone looked into his house.¹¹⁵ At the centre of this private sphere lay the relationship between husband and wife: if one told tales about the other, especially if they were stories about their sexuality, the injured party could divorce the other, even if the wife 'had been bound [to her husband] by binding-surety and property-surety'.¹¹⁶

An eighth-century story, 'The Saga of Fergus mac Léti', illustrates, however, the point that what matters in the end about publicity is what one knows and knows that others know.¹¹⁷ Fergus mac Léti was king of the Ulstermen.¹¹⁸ By chance he obtained from a dwarf the ability to swim under water. One lake only was forbidden him by the dwarf: Loch Rudraige, which lay within his own kingdom of Ulster. Eventually, Fergus violated this prohibition, and while swimming in Loch Rudraige he met a monster so terrifying that his mouth was stretched right round to the back of his head. An Irish king was not allowed to have a physical blemish, so Fergus's misfortune threatened his kingship. His charioteer

¹¹³ *Hib.* xviii.1-4.

¹¹⁴ *CIH* 593.32-3 = *Berrad Airechta*, § 36 (tr. Thurneysen, *Bürgschaft*, p. 11; tr. R. Chapman Stacey, in Charles-Edwards *et al.*, eds., *Lawyers and Laymen*, p. 215).

¹¹⁵ *Crith Gablach*, ed. Binchy, § 16, lines 209-11.

¹¹⁶ *CIH* 47.21-31; cf. 5.23 (*fer forindit caemdu*), 15.14-15 (the *cantaith scel*).

¹¹⁷ Ed. and tr. D. A. Binchy, *Ériu*, 16 (1952), 33-48.

¹¹⁸ He is not to be confused with Fergus mac Roíg, also king of the Ulstermen.

encouraged the king to sleep and scuttled off to seek advice from the wise men of Ulster in the expectation that all would agree that Fergus would have to be replaced by a new king. The wise men, however, decided to keep Fergus as king, in spite of all rules to the contrary. To do this it was necessary that no one should taunt the king with his blemish:

The decision of the wise men of Ulster was that the king should come to his house, and that beforehand a clearance should be made of all the base folk so that there should be neither fool nor half-wit therein lest these should cast his blemish in the king's face.¹¹⁹

In the end, however, his slavewoman, Dorn, did taunt him, whereupon he killed her, went off to Loch Rudraige, dived under the waves and fought the monster for a day and a night:

Eventually he emerged on the surface of the loch, holding the head of the monster, so that the Ulstermen saw him, and he said to them: 'I am the survivor.' Thereupon he sank down dead, and for a whole month the loch remained red from the battle between them.

He still had his blemish, the fruit of his fear; but he had vindicated his honour, his blemished face, before the eyes of his people, who, as he now knew, had seen and known what he had not known.

It is implicit in the resolution of the story that Fergus could not have remained king, even though he triumphed over his fear and killed the monster. He still had his blemish and that blemish was upon his face, the metaphor for honour; his face – his honour – could never again have an acceptable appearance because the taunt had been uttered 'to his face'. Of course, the men of rank and wisdom had known of this blemish all along, but it had now been given a publicity in words which could not be circumvented.¹²⁰ Facts could be evaded, but not words. Fergus died a king, but he had to be prompt in dying in order to do so.

(e) *The household (muintir)*

This power of the public word and the opposed right to privacy within a house and a marriage explains why the law included, as one of the grounds of divorce, the bringing of satire by a husband on his wife, and why 'the making of nicknames that adhere' rendered the coiner of the nicknames liable to pay the honour-price of the victim.¹²¹ Fergus mac

¹¹⁹ 'The Saga of Fergus mac Léti', ed. Binchy, § 7.

¹²⁰ Cf. *Bretha Déin Chécht*, ed. D. A. Binchy, *Ériu*, 20 (1966), pp. 40–1, § 31: 'An exact *cumal* from every mouth that publishes it [the blemish] in the presence of an assembly.'

¹²¹ *CIH* 29.17; 47.21–31.

Léti had to be brought to his house, a house from which all ‘base folk’, who could not control their mouths, had been removed. The king, therefore, could not appear *i túaith*, in public among his people. But, of course, that was one of the central functions of a king, to be a public face: the king of a *túath* had to be *i túaith*. This was one good reason why he had to be unblemished. However, within the house and the enclosing *les*, marked by ditch and bank, there was a different idiom of life. This was not the public sphere in which words made war on behalf of men and factions, where faces were scrutinised and judged, and where poets imposed their ‘law of the face’.¹²² Even if spouse denounced spouse within this sphere, it could be endured providing harsh words did not ‘adhere’, in other words, pass from mouth to mouth out of the house into the *túath*, so that they stuck to the public face. Admittedly there was every risk that harsh words might get out of the *les*: to protect Fergus mac Léti’s honour all ‘base folk’ (*dóescarslúag*) had to be removed from the house. For this reason, men approved of women of gentle speech;¹²³ the opposite was the oft-mentioned and apparently much-feared ‘woman who cuts’, and it went without saying that such a woman did her cutting with words not knives.¹²⁴

The privacy of nobles and substantial commoners was protected by the physical and legal layout of their farms. As we have already seen, the house lay within an area enclosed by a bank – the area thus enclosed was usually known as the *les* – and both the *les* and the house were in varying degrees private.¹²⁵ Someone could open the gate of a *les*, but he could not then enter without permission. One may assume that looking into a *les* carried no penalty; looking into a house, however, was penalised, and so was opening the door of the house without permission. Privacy was thus graded. Even outside the *les* a farmer had a degree of control over his land which varied according to proximity to the house. The area immediately around the *les* was known as the *airlise*, ‘that which is in front of the *les*’; a more extensive area was called the *faithche*, the ‘infield’;¹²⁶

¹²² *CIH* III.11, 12, 20.

¹²³ *Tecosca Cormaic*, ed. K. Meyer, *The Instructions of King Cormac mac Airt* (Dublin, 1909), § 13.37.

¹²⁴ E.g. *Bretha Cróige*, ed. and tr. D. A. Binchy, *Ériu*, 12:1 (1934), 1–77, § 32; *CIH* 15. 14.

¹²⁵ For the following see esp. *Crith Gablach*, ed. Binchy, § 16, lines 209–20; Kelly, *Early Irish Farming*, pp. 360–72. *Crith Gablach* speaks of a *dún* only when it is talking of kings, but refers to the making of the king’s *dún* as a ‘labour-due of base clientship’, *drécht gíallnae*, thereby suggesting that other lords than kings may have had a *dún* rather than a simple *les*: § 45, lines 566–76.

¹²⁶ Cf. the approximate estimates of size in *Crith Gablach*, ed. Binchy, § 16, lines 219–20, and *Bechbretha*, ed. Charles-Edwards and Kelly, § 46 and n. A recent discussion of the *faithche* is by C. Swift, ‘Forts and Fields: A Study of “Monastic Towns” in Seventh and Eighth Century Ireland’, *The Journal of Irish Archaeology*, 9 (1998), 110–12.

and, finally, a man might have outfield, *sechtar fáithche*.¹²⁷ Theft incurred a more or less heavy compensation to someone's honour according to whether it took place in his house, in the infield or in the outfield.¹²⁸

The normal household was considered by the Irish to involve three types of relationship. First, there was the sexual union between a man and a woman.¹²⁹ Such a union, if it was the nucleus of the household, was expected to be created by a formal contract between the woman's kindred and the man: the kindred 'bound' her to the man.¹³⁰ At the heart of the household, therefore, was a relationship which should be created by agreement, preferably by the most formal available agreement, the full-dress contract buttressed by two types of surety.¹³¹ On the other hand, the relationship between parents and children was the starting-point of kinship, the paradigm of a relationship which was given rather than created. There might be, as it were, contractual children, both those adopted and, more commonly, those fostered, but these relationships imitated to a greater or lesser degree the relationship between natural parents and children. Finally, there was the relationship between master and slave or servant. Not every household had slaves or servants, but those without were 'small households'.¹³² This relationship might have been created by purchase or by war, but a slave might also be a child begotten by the free head of the household on his slavewoman: a man could gain a slave for himself in bed as well as on the battlefield or in the market-place. This was the case, for example, with Brigit herself, the child of a freeman, Dubthach, and his slavewoman.¹³³ A similar overlapping case is that of the *senchléithe*, someone whose ancestors have been *fuirdirs* of a particular line of lords for four generations. His ancestors had

¹²⁷ The *fáithche* also surrounded the *dún*, 'fort', of a king (*CIH* 50.28), and the *cell*, 'church' (*CIH* 207.2, where the *cell* without a *fáithche* is exceptional); a *nemed*, 'sacred area', may have a *fáithche*, 37. 1, or a *termonn*, 50.28. *CS* 849 refers to the *fáithche* of the church of Slane, *CS* 872 to the *fáithche* of the church of Dulane.

¹²⁸ Kelly, *Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 147; *Bechbretha*, ed. Charles-Edwards and Kelly, §§ 50–3.

¹²⁹ The fundamental work is Thurneysen *et al.* [ed. D. A. Binchy], *Studies in Early Irish Law*; important discussions since then include D. Ó Corráin, 'Women in Early Irish Society', *Women in Irish Society: The Historical Dimension*, ed. M. Mac Curtain and D. Ó Corráin (Dublin, 1978), pp. 1–13; *id.*, 'Marriage in Early Ireland', in *Marriage in Ireland*, ed. A. Cosgrove (Dublin, 1985), pp. 5–24; *id.*, 'Women and the Law in Early Ireland', in M. O'Dowd and S. Wichert (eds.), *Chattel, Servant, or Citizen: Women's Status in Church, State and Society* (Belfast, 1995), pp. 45–57; Kelly, *Guide to Early Irish Law*, pp. 68–79; B. Jaski, 'Marriage Laws in Ireland and on the Continent in the Early Middle Ages', in C. Meek and K. Simms (eds.), *'The Fragility of her Sex'? Medieval Irish Women in their European Context* (Blackrock, Co. Dublin, 1996), pp. 16–42.

¹³⁰ R. Thurneysen, 'Heirat', in Thurneysen *et al.*, *Studies in Early Irish Law*, pp. 109–12; *Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchy, § 15, lines 199–200 (the *mrugfer's* wife is to be 'in the proper condition of a *cét-muintir*'). ¹³¹ *CIH* 47.21. ¹³² Adomnán, *VSC* ii.32, 37; *EIWK*, pp. 134–5.

¹³³ *Vita Prima S. Brigitae*, tr. Connolly, c. 4 (she was subsequently freed in c. 12).

been half-free and thus in the economic position of slaves; but with the passing of four generations the role became a status and the *senchléithe* was now bound to his lord.¹³⁴

The central relationship of man and woman in the household could be fragile. Irish law recognised and made detailed provision for divorce – or rather ‘parting’, since *scarad* included the ending of a union by the death of one or both partners. Yet around this relationship which had to be constructed and might well be taken apart, there were more permanent relationships of master and slave and of parent and child. These normally centred upon the man: the land was typically his and his sons were therefore bound to him by the prospect of inheritance as well as their membership of his kindred. The slaves could be the wife’s rather than the husband’s, but the *senchléithi*, bound to that farm by generations of service, went with the land and therefore with the man.

The rules for division of property on ‘parting’ give some idea of the respective roles of husband and wife in the economy of the household. The main principle of the scheme is one that we have already met, namely that there are three equal claims on the property: land, cattle and labour.¹³⁵ All is then worked out on the basis that it is livestock which is being divided. If, for example, the land on which cattle have grazed belongs to the husband, that gives him (or his heirs) a claim to a third share. If the cattle are descended from those that the wife brought to the marriage (her ‘input’, *tinchor*), that gives her (or her heirs) the right to a third share.¹³⁶ If the two of them have looked after the cattle between them, they will divide the third share that goes to labour. These three claims to a share are, more or less, the three classical factors of production: land, capital and labour. The tract on marriage, *Cáin Lánamna*, devotes most attention to the share that accrues to labour in ‘a union of joint contribution’ – in other words, a union in which both parties have contributed property to a farm which is managed as a single unit, though both husband and wife continue to have distinct property rights. The reason why labour hogs the attention of the author of the tract is probably because in this *lánamnas comthinchuir*, ‘union of joint-contribution’, both parties contributed roughly equally to the livestock, while all or nearly all the land belonged to the husband. The most complex issue was the share belonging to labour.

¹³⁴ *Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchy, § 23, lines 326–7, and above, pp. 92–3.

¹³⁵ *Cáin Lánamna*, ed. Thurneysen, § 10.

¹³⁶ The *indud cethrae*, ‘growth of livestock’, corresponds to the *semen in pecoribus* of *Hib.*, xliii.6; both refer to the livestock born to those brought into the relationship.

The tract's assumptions about who will have done most labour in a given part of the farm reveal something about the respective spheres of husband and wife. What was at issue, first of all, was the share belonging to labour of the cattle born during the marriage. Labour's share was itself divided into three (in other words, ninth shares of the total). One third went to the man of the house, another third to the woman of the house, and the last third was assigned to the *aurgnamthi*, 'the labourers'. This last item is puzzling, first since the whole point of this division is that it is the share accruing to *aurgnam*, 'labour', and secondly because it does not seem likely that slaves, who undoubtedly did a lot of the work looking after livestock, were given a share. If slaves did the *aurgnam* – in other words were agricultural rather than just domestic slaves – the share of the *aurgnamthi* may have belonged, not to the slaves themselves, but to the owner, whether husband or wife. The *aurgnamthi* might also be non-servile labourers or, more probably, people who undertook to look after a farm for a couple when they were too old or infirm to do all the work themselves. The mention by *Cáin Lánamna* of *goire* ('warmth, *pietas*' and thus 'looking after the old or infirm') and the evidence of the *Hibernensis* strongly suggest the latter.¹³⁷ Their inclusion makes good sense when one remembers that *scarad* may occur on the death of a partner and will therefore frequently be preceded by a period of infirmity. When the couple were in good health, they would presumably often divide the share going to labour into two halves.

Husband and wife, therefore, collaborated in looking after cattle. Milk and milk-products were, however, largely in the sphere of the wife. The division here went as follows:¹³⁸

Milk: $\frac{1}{3}$ to land
 $\frac{1}{3}$ to livestock (who contributed the original stock)
 $\frac{1}{3}$ to labour, of which
 $\frac{1}{2}$ (= $\frac{1}{6}$ of the whole) to the wife
 $\frac{1}{4}$ (= $\frac{1}{12}$) to the 'vessels' (used in milking etc.)
 $\frac{1}{6}$ (= $\frac{1}{18}$) to the husband
 $\frac{1}{12}$ (= $\frac{1}{36}$) to the *aurgnamthi*

In other words, the wife's contribution to the labour of milking and producing butter and cheese is reckoned to be three times as valuable as the husband's.

Two other spheres, arable and pigs, are treated together.¹³⁹ Here the

¹³⁷ *Cáin Lánamna*, ed. Thurneysen, § 11 (*macslabra gaire*, 'child-cattle of piety'); *Hib.* xxxii.20–2. This removes the need for Thurneysen's worries in his commentary.

¹³⁸ *Cáin Lánamna*, Thurneysen, § 12. ¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, § 14.

third share going to labour is divided again into three: a wife who has been involved (in part probably *via* the work done by her slaves) with ploughing, reaping and looking after the pigs gets one third (except for pigs fattened upon milk, when she gets two thirds).¹⁴⁰ The unstated corollary seems to be that the husband gets two thirds. Arable farming and pig farming are thus mainly within his sphere.

These cases all go to demonstrate that within the household economy husband and wife performed distinct but interdependent roles. This same balance between distinction and community of labour is particularly well shown by the rules for the division of wool and linen.¹⁴¹ From fleeces and from bundles of flax the wife gets a sixth of the share that goes to labour; from wool that is ready for spinning she gets a third; and from finished clothing or other material she gets a half. The assumption here is that the husband has done most of the work caring for the sheep and harvesting the flax, but that the wife is then responsible for working it up into finished material. They cooperate in the whole process of making clothing and other woollen and linen material, but each is responsible for different stages.

The impression given by these rules may be of a cohesive and interdependent domestic unit. Yet the rules operated not just when a partner died but also when the couple divorced. The Church's stand in favour of monogamy and against divorce did not transform native Irish law on these matters although it made some difference to its expression.¹⁴² One possible reason may be offered – not thereby excluding others – for the frequent failure to achieve the normal Christian combination of a rule of monogamy and domestic and economic interdependence between husband and wife. The forces encouraging stability in marital unions were probably strongest among reasonably well-off commoners. Such couples had a viable farm consisting mainly of inherited land. On the other hand, they were not so well off that they ceased themselves to do much of the work on their farm.

An Irish lord, however, lived partly on the food-renders of his clients; part of the land which sustained his household therefore belonged to, and was farmed by, others. Both he and his wife are also likely to have had more slaves, so that even on their own farm they may well have done

¹⁴⁰ I take the phrase *frisi-mbi ar 7 buain* etc. to mean, not that she herself did the ploughing, which is unlikely given the strength needed, but that her men, probably slaves, did the work, and it thus gave her a claim to a share on the basis of *aurnam*; cf. Goody, *Production and Reproduction*, pp. 31–40.

¹⁴¹ *Cáin Lánamna*, ed. Thurneysen, § 15.

¹⁴² E.g. the use of *adaltrach*, literally 'adulteress', for a secondary wife, and the declaration of the ideal of monogamy, *CIH* 2231.4–6.

little agricultural work. The household economy of a noble may have done much less to bind together husband and wife in a programme of work in which they were interdependent and also active, in part, together. Moreover, nobles were especially hard-driven by the need to find political allies. It was this need which explained why any normal child of high status could expect to have more than one set of foster-parents. One way of contracting alliances was through marriage. A nobleman's economy was always a dangerous balance between opposing forces. He needed to make many alliances; the best way of doing so, perhaps, was through marriage and the birth of children, especially sons; polygyny therefore made excellent political sense in the short term, but it was likely to provide many heirs for whom it would be very difficult to provide in the long term, and it undoubtedly brought the danger of tension between co-wives.¹⁴³ Moreover, if a marriage was made to confirm an alliance and the alliance broke down, it might well bring down the marriage with it. It may therefore be proposed that aristocratic marriage and therefore aristocratic households may have been less stable than the marriages and households of commoners.

Apart from the formal union discussed so far, in which the woman's kindred 'bound' her to the man by contract, there were others of varying degrees of informality. In some the kindred might come to recognise a union created by the initiative of the couple; in others the kindred gave no recognition; and, finally, there were unions of a wholly temporary nature to which the woman did not consent, such as rape. Some of these did not form part of households, but the lawyers assigned to each their consequences in terms of payments and liabilities. The general principle underlying the classification of sexual unions was in terms of degrees of willing involvement, whether that of the woman's kindred or the woman herself.¹⁴⁴ The legal approach was to recognise the fact of a union, of whatever kind, and then to deal with the consequences, rather than, from the start, to divide sexual unions into two great classes, marriage and the rest.

(f) The retinue, the warband and the company of boys (déis, fian and macrad)

The ordinary retinue consisted of the men who owed allegiance to a lord, whether as clients ('base' or 'free'), as half-free *fluidri* and *bothaig* or

¹⁴³ *Cáin Lánamna*, ed. Thurneysen, § 23; *CIH* 7.29; 289.31; Kelly, *Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 79.

¹⁴⁴ See the summary in Kelly, *Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 70.

as *senchléithe*.¹⁴⁵ Of these most is known about the base clients, namely those who owed a fixed annual food-render in return for a grant by the lord. They were expected to defend or avenge their lord in the feud and to accompany him in war and to public meetings.¹⁴⁶ They were also obliged to give him hospitality, notably in the 'coshering season' between 1 January and Ash Wednesday.¹⁴⁷ Clients may also have formed part of the *dám*, 'company', which a lord could take with him on a journey, and which was given hospitality by other noblemen. An Irish nobleman's retinue thus formed a social unit, bound together by association to each other as well as to their common lord. Since the lawtract on base clientship, *Cáin Aicillne*, declares that it is better to have a kinsman as one's lord, the two groups, kindred and nobleman's retinue, are likely to have overlapped. A significant element among the kinsmen who were also clients may have been young men who had not yet received their full inheritance.¹⁴⁸

Distinct from the nobleman's retinue was the warband or *fian*.¹⁴⁹ This typically consisted of young men who took a vow of loyalty to each other and who changed their appearance to signify their role. In the eighth-century Life of St Cainnech of Aghaboe, the holy man meets twelve laymen who 'took an evil oath, that is they were *dibergich*'.¹⁵⁰ The *fian* was associated with paganism and was openly condemned by the Church. Many of the Irish raids on Britain in the fourth and fifth centuries may have been carried out by warbands of the *fian* type. It will be suggested later that the early expansion of the Uí Néill is also likely to have been effected by *fianna* led by the sons of Níall. By AD 700 their activities are likely to have been constrained by the *cairde* ('peace-treaties') which were then a widespread feature of political life, but they reappeared in the ninth century.¹⁵¹

Before a boy took arms, and therefore before he could enter a *fian*, he might form part of a group of boys in a royal household. The greater nobles may also have had such groups attached to their households. The legal evidence is fragmentary because there is only a brief

¹⁴⁵ *Crith Gablach*, ed. Binchy, § 23, lines 323–4. ¹⁴⁶ *CIH* 484.15; 486.32–3.

¹⁴⁷ *Crith Gablach*, ed. Binchy, § 27, lines 399–400; D. A. Binchy, 'Aimser Chue', pp. 18–22.

¹⁴⁸ *EIWK*, pp. 360–2.

¹⁴⁹ R. Sharpe, 'Hiberno-Latin *Laicus*, Irish *Láech* and the Devil's Men', *Ériu*, 30 (1979), 75–92; K. McCone, 'Werewolves, Cyclopes, *Diberga*, and *Fianna*: Juvenile Delinquency in Early Ireland', *CMCS*, 12 (1986), 1–22. ¹⁵⁰ *Vita S. Caimnechi*, c. 45, ed. Heist, *Vitae*, p. 194.

¹⁵¹ On the *cairde* see Thurneysen, *Bürgschaft*, pp. 32–3; for the fragments of a tract called *Bretha Cairdi*, 'Treaty Judgements', see L. Breatnach, 'On the Original Extent of the *Senchas Már*', *Ériu*, 47 (1996), pp. 31–2 (no. 31); for the prevalence of *cairde* relationships in the eighth century, see below, pp. 570, 593–4.

passage surviving from the tract *Mellbretha*, 'Judgements on Games', and only short extracts from *Macíslechta*, 'Categories of Child'.¹⁵² For that reason it is not quite clear how the law on boys under the age at which they took arms was related to the law of fosterage, to which we shall come next. Nor is it certain, though it is likely, that it was at this stage of life that a boy was called a *maccóem*, literally 'dear boy'.¹⁵³ The king-list of Mide has a note under Domnall mac Murchada (*ob.* 763) saying that his son Fiachu was killed by two joint-rulers of the Fir Ross 'in Brega, when he was on a circuit of *maccoím*'.¹⁵⁴ The implication of the note appears to be that the *maccoím* were sent on circuit apart from the king himself, in effect as a subsidiary royal circuit or progress around his subject kingdoms.

One of the most interesting pieces of evidence about the *macrad* or 'group of boys' is the story in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* of how Cú Chulainn went to the capital of Ulster, Emain Macha.¹⁵⁵ He went unannounced from his parents' house at Airgdech in Mag Muirthemne, not knowing that before any boy came among the *macrad* at Emain Macha his protection had to be guaranteed by surety. One of the boys, Follomon, son of Conchobar king of the Ulstermen, declared that the new arrival had insulted them, 'though we know that he is of the Ulstermen', by inserting himself into their *cluchemag*, 'playing-field', without any due preliminaries. Being the hero he was, Cú Chulainn made short work of the hundred-and-fifty-odd boys in the *macrad*; nine of them he pursued even into the king's house where they took refuge between Fergus mac Roig and Conchobar as they were playing *fidchell* (a board-game, much played by the Irish and Welsh). Cú Chulainn took a flying leap across the *fidchell* board but Conchobar caught him by the fore-arm:

'The *macrad* are not being treated well,' said Conchobar.

'I had good reason, master Conchobar,' said he. 'I came to the play from my house, from my mother and from my father, and they have not been fair to me.'

'What is your name?' said Conchobar.

'I am called Séntanta son of Súaltaim, and the son of Dechtere your sister. It did not seem likely that I should be tormented here.'

¹⁵² *Mellbretha*, ed. Binchy, *Celtica*, 8 (1968), 144–54, = *CIH* 1589; the main section of material from *Macíslechta* is at *CIH* 1546.26–1550.14 (for further details see Breatnach, 'On the Original Extent of the *Senchas Már*', 30–1); Kelly, *Guide to Early Irish Law*, pp. 150–1.

¹⁵³ The word is rendered into Latin as *filius carus* and is used for a boy in fosterage in the *Vita I S. Fintani*, c. 24, ed. Heist, *Vitae*, p. 205; it was borrowed into Welsh as *maccweyf*.

¹⁵⁴ *LL* lines 5932–4; for the Welsh counterpart, see *Survey of the Honour of Denbigh*, ed. P. Vinogradoff and F. Morgan (London, 1914), pp. 46, 149, 209.

¹⁵⁵ *Táin Bó Cúailnge, Recension I*, ed. O'Rahilly, pp. 13–15 (tr. pp. 136–7).

'Why was your protection from the boys not guaranteed by surety?' said Conchobar.

'I did not know that,' said Cú Chulainn. 'Take then into your hand my protection from them.'

'I acknowledge,' said Conchobar.

Thereupon he attacked the boys throughout the house.

'What have you got against them now?' said Conchobar.

'[Everything], until their protection has been bound upon me also,' said Cú Chulainn.

'Take it into your hand then,' said Conchobar.

'I acknowledge,' said Cú Chulainn.

They all went to the playing-field and the boys who had been cut down then got up. Their foster-mothers and their foster-fathers came to their aid.

The five-year-old Cú Chulainn may have been of extraordinary physical strength befitting a hero, but he was also a sharp-witted lawyer prepared to bandy legal niceties and exchange correct legal formulae with the king of the Ulstermen himself.¹⁵⁶ The saga, whatever the particular exaggerations it may contain, agrees with the laws that even the games of boys were defined and controlled by law; and both imply the existence of a distinct stage of life governed by such rules.

(g) *Fosterage*

The conclusion of Cú Chulainn's first sharp encounter with the *macrad* of Emain Macha was the arrival of their foster-mothers and foster-fathers. It seems as if the saga-writer assumed that a king's court should be the setting of numerous bonds of fosterage, not just between himself and the children of his subjects, but also between people often or always present in his court and children of an age to be fostered. Cú Chulainn's fosterage arrangements have already been mentioned: as befitted someone of high rank he had several foster-parents. Indeed, a version of the story of his conception evolved into a word-battle conducted before Conchobar as to which of the Ulster heroes should have the honour of fostering the boy. The solution was that they all should in turn, because each had something different to teach him. Similarly, when Tírechán's Patrick got to Crúachain, the ancient capital of Connaught, he met the daughters of Lóegaire, king of Tara, who were being fostered by druids.

¹⁵⁶ For the formulae cf. *Berrad Airechta*, ed. Thurneysen, *Bürgschaft*, §§ 51, 57. The use of *atmu* rather than *aicdiu* is because Conchobar was accepting the role of binding-surety rather than, as a contracting party, appointing sureties.

They had come to the well in the morning, ‘as women do’, to wash. When he preached to them, one of them answered, in the most delightful section of Tírechán’s whole text:¹⁵⁷

Who is God and where is God and whose God is he and where is his dwelling-place? Has your God sons and daughters, gold and silver? Is he ever-living, is he beautiful, have many fostered his son, are his daughters lovable and beautiful in the eyes of the men of the earth?

It was as appropriate that the son of the king of kings should be fostered by many as that his daughters should be beautiful and much-loved.

Fosterage, like so much else in Irish society, was a contractual agreement: here, between the natural parents and the foster-parents. Normally, the natural parents bound themselves to supply the household fostering their child with certain prescribed resources. If this were not so, the fosterage was a ‘fosterage of love’. The foster-parents bound themselves to maintain the child at a level appropriate to its status and to give instruction. Children were fostered from the age of seven to the age of puberty (taken as fourteen).¹⁵⁸

The social idiom of Irish fosterage is nicely illustrated by a story told in an eighth-century *Life of Munnu* (Fintan), the founder and patron saint of Taghmon, Co. Wexford.¹⁵⁹ A king of the Fothairt called Dímma Camchoss¹⁶⁰ had two sons, Cellach or Cellacán, who was fostered in Airbre by an anchorite called Cúan, and Cillíne, who was fostered in Taghmon by Munnu.¹⁶¹

One day King Dímma came with the nobles of the Fothairt, sixty of them, to Cúan of Airbre, and there they saw Cellach son of Dímma in a dark-blue hooded cloak with purple arrow-shaped ornament [*sagittis*], and having on his shoulders a fastener¹⁶² with heads of bronze. And on his feet he had shoes decorated with Parthian leather and bronze. And the boy’s clothing pleased them, and they said, ‘Here our son is well fostered.’ Then the Fothairt came with the king to Taghmon and they sat down in front of the entrance to the monastery. Carts came past them, and in front of the carts boys singing psalms with loud voices, and their fasteners were attached to the yokes. And they saw Cillíne son of Dímma in front of the cart in a hooded cloak of black, the colour of

¹⁵⁷ Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 26.5. The translation is Bieler’s with one minor change: ‘ever-living’ (*semper uiuus*) = Ir. *bithbéo*; ‘lovable’ (*carae*) = Ir. *coíma*.

¹⁵⁸ Kelly, *Guide to Early Irish Law*, pp. 88–9, on the different ages given by the texts for the end of fosterage.

¹⁵⁹ *Vita I S. Fintani seu Munnu*, c. 24, ed. Heist, *Vitae*, pp. 204–5; *Vita II S. Fintani*, c. 20, ed. Heist, *Vitae*, p. 252.

¹⁶⁰ For him see *CGH* i.82 (126 a 3).
¹⁶¹ Note that both Cellacán and Cillín are diminutives formed from *cell* ‘church’; Cellach is an ordinary derivative from *cell*.

¹⁶² *Ceraculum* apparently a spelling of *seraculum*, a diminutive to *sera* ‘bolt, bar’, a brooch?.

sheep,¹⁶³ and in a tunic, short and white, with a black border and in cheap shoes. And that clothing displeased them greatly, and they said, 'The extent of love for us in these two monasteries is revealed in the way the two sons are fostered.'

Munnu, however, who was aware of what they were saying, prophesied that Cellach would possess neither heaven nor earth but would be killed at the command of all the Leinstermen, while Cillíne would be the 'lord of a church and a learned scribe and a bishop and an anchorite' – that is to say, he would have every conceivable ecclesiastical qualification for high status – 'and he will possess the kingdom of God'. A saint who could guarantee such things for his fosterling could get away with clothing him in a short white tunic and cheap shoes; the laws suggest, however, that ordinary men had to take more trouble with the material details of fosterage.¹⁶⁴

(h) Church and monastery

Apart from the saint himself, the person who comes best out of this story is the king, Dímma mac Áeda Croin. He was the friend and ally of the saint, a friendship which began with his gift of land to Munnu and continued with Dímma's giving his son to Munnu in fosterage. It was to culminate in him becoming a cleric, after a long life fulfilled 'in all my desires', and being buried among Munnu's own monks on holy ground with the holy man's personal guarantee that he would gain the kingdom of heaven in exchange for his grant of land to Munnu.¹⁶⁵ As this shows, monastic communities were composed of more than monks. The best guide to who was or was not part of the community was not so much who was present in church to sing the office as who was buried in the monastic cemetery, a privilege granted to monks, including monastic tenants, and to benefactors such as Dímma. The monastic community included, therefore, both those whose vocation was monastic prayer and those on behalf of whom the monks proper offered up their prayers. It was a community of prayer, but of beneficiaries as well as those who prayed. In the seventh and early eighth century ordinary

¹⁶³ The usual colour of sheep in early medieval Ireland was dark brown or black: Kelly, *Early Irish Farming*, p. 70, where it is pointed out that a white fleece was twice as valuable as a dark one; cf. also Gerald of Wales, *Topographia Hiberniae*, ed. J. J. O'Meara, *PRLA*, 52 c (1948–50), no. 4, p. 162, tr. J. J. O'Meara, *The History and Topography of Ireland*, Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth, 1982), c. 93.

¹⁶⁴ *CIH* 1762.4, 18, and Kelly, *Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 87 on the standard of clothing for foster-children. ¹⁶⁵ *Vita I. S. Fintani*, c. 20 (ed. Heist, *Vitae*, p. 203).

laymen were still being buried in the cemetery traditionally used by their kindreds.

The inclusion of a lay and professionally military element within the wider monastic community is illustrated by a story in the same *Life of Munnu*. A layman and warrior, who was also a *monachus* of St Fintan (Munnu), accompanied the richly attired (but ill-fated) son of Dimma on an expedition during which they killed a son of the king of Leinster, Crundmáel.¹⁶⁶ This lay monk ended up in chains with the close prospect of execution (as a *cimbid*). Munnu sent five monks, in this instance clerics and holy men, to rescue their errant fellow-monk. Someone condemned as a *cimbid* could normally be ransomed: Munnu, however, proposed to use other means. The five holy monks saved their colleague by means of a miracle. However deplorable his conduct he remained a member of their community.

The importance of the relationship between a church and its wider community is connected with another issue, the question of who benefited from pastoral care and who sustained a church by payment of dues and offerings. It has been argued that the texts reveal two stand-points on this issue: first, there are relatively vague pronouncements that perceive a mutual relationship of obligation, effectively a contract, as obtaining between church and *túath*, the laity of a local kingdom; secondly, there are more specific rulings indicating that those who had such a contractual right to pastoral care were *manaig*, church-tenants, not the laity at large.¹⁶⁷ The first category of evidence is seen as ineffectual aspiration; the second as reality. There are difficulties with this argument. First, one may readily accept that *manaig*, because they were subject to a church and owed dues to it, had a special right to pastoral care; yet that is not to say that only *manaig* had, in practice, effective claims to such care. Secondly, it is entirely possible that a local *túath* considered itself entitled to pastoral care because its population included *manaig* who owed dues to the church. This suggestion is strengthened by evidence that a king of a *túath* might be expected to give his consent to alienations to a church.¹⁶⁸ Thirdly, it is evident that where one branch of a lineage

¹⁶⁶ *Vita I. S. Fintani*, c. 26 (ed. Heist, *Vitae*, p. 206); cf. *Vita S. Colmani*, c. 31 (ed. Heist, *Vitae*, p. 219). The Crundmáel in question was probably Crundmáel mac Áeda of the Uí Chennselaig, *ob.* 628.

¹⁶⁷ C. Etchingham, 'The Early Irish Church: Some Observations on Pastoral Care and Dues', *Ériu*, 42 (1991), 99–118; the conclusion is stated thus (p. 118): 'the main thesis of this paper is that what evidence there is relating to regular pastoral care and dues suggests that, while in theory bearing on the population at large, they are likely to applied consistently only to those over whom the church exercised direct authority, namely its *manach*-tenants'.

¹⁶⁸ *Additamenta*, c. 8, ed. Bieler, *Patrician Documents from the Book of Armagh*, p. 172.

became *manaig*, the whole lineage may have regarded itself as entitled to benefit from the church to which their kinsmen were attached. There are examples of this third scenario where the kindred attached to the church was a branch of the ruling family of the *túath*.¹⁶⁹ It is scarcely probable that the other branches of such a ruling family would not have considered themselves fully entitled to whatever care the church of their kinsmen had to offer.

Since a monastic *familia* embraced more than just those monks who would regularly sing the office in the principal church, it necessarily included different elements. The sources, however, are usually concerned to display and promote the unity of the *familia* rather than its divisions and this hampers investigation of the internal constitution of the major churches.

First, we may examine the problem topographically and begin with a distinction between the *civitas* – a term which, in Ireland, was often used to mean a major ecclesiastical settlement – and detached portions of the community.¹⁷⁰ There were other terms for such settlements, and some texts avoid *civitas* in an Irish context, but it is a convenient term and will be adopted in what follows.¹⁷¹ A *civitas* was not any church, but one served by a variety of offices, principally a priest (or, in some cases, a bishop), a scribe (roughly a combination of exegete and ecclesiastical judge) and a steward.¹⁷² A *civitas* might be a male or female monastery, or it might be mixed; the major *civitates* had bishops, for whose pastoral work a monastery might provide a base, although the monks or nuns themselves probably did not engage in pastoral work outside their monasteries; prayer for the dead, a central demand of the laity, is, however, likely to have been a concern of monks and nuns.¹⁷³ The grander *civitates* exhibited symptoms of urban status: for example, an unusual density of population associated with a variety of crafts, transcending

¹⁶⁹ As at Trim or Saul or the *domnach* church near the Wood of Fochloth among the Uí Amolngada of Mayo: see above, pp. 32, 48, 65–70.

¹⁷⁰ For *civitas*, see e.g. *Hib.* xx.2 (where the attribution to Augustine is false and the text is Irish); xlv.2; *Vita S. Fintani seu Munnu*, c. 19 (ed. Heist, *Vitae*, p. 203); *Vita S. Columbae de Tír dá Glas*, cc. 28, 31 (ed. Heist, *Vitae*, pp. 232, 233).

¹⁷¹ It was not used for Irish places by Adomnán, but only for major foreign settlements: *VSC* i.28 (a city in Italy), ii.46, iii.23 (135b) (both Rome).

¹⁷² In *Hib.* xx.2, the ten *civitates* have ten judges (in xxi.1, the ecclesiastical judge as opposed to the secular *iuris peritus* appears to be typically a *scriba*).

¹⁷³ R. Sharpe, 'Churches and Communities in Early Medieval Ireland: Towards a Pastoral Model', in J. Blair and R. Sharpe (eds.), *Pastoral Care before the Parish* (Leicester, 1992), 99: 'there is no evidence that pastoral care in local communities depended on monks'. For prayer for the dead, see e.g. *CIH* 529.21 (*umaind anma* 'hymn for the soul [of a dead person]'), where it is a right of the *túath*; *CIH* 2129.34–5, where it is a right of the *manaig*.

the agricultural sphere; an area delimited by a boundary and enjoying a special legal status.¹⁷⁴

The population of a *civitas* might, however, fluctuate considerably, and so too might the material wealth within its boundary. This was a direct consequence of its role as a sanctuary, both for those accused of an offence or threatened by feud and also, more generally, in time of war.¹⁷⁵ Such occasions, especially the latter, could bring not just people but their possessions within the monastic precinct. Moreover, the plan of some *civitates* at least was modified to cope with such influxes. As we have seen, any free person's home had precincts around it: first, the area enclosed by a *les* – the ring of the ringfort – and then the *airlise*, the area on the outside of the *les* and extending for a certain distance outwards.¹⁷⁶ Such a pattern seems to have been combined with Old Testament precedents and adapted for the purposes of the *civitas*. The prohibition on violence within any freeman's *les* was easily extended to the ecclesiastical settlement;¹⁷⁷ with the Old Testament notion of a 'city of refuge', *civitas refugii*, this gave a legal foundation for ecclesiastical sanctuary.¹⁷⁸ To offer sanctuary, however, entailed allowing criminals on to holy ground, into the precinct of the saint, and rules were therefore proposed which defined a series of precincts, pleasantly named 'holy', 'holier' and 'holiest'. Those who had committed 'capital sins', such as homicide or adultery, were allowed into the outer, merely holy, precinct; the ordinarily sinful laity, those 'not much given to iniquity', were allowed into the second, while the third was restricted to the clergy.¹⁷⁹ The topography and population of the major ecclesiastical settlements were thus likely to be complex.

Even the relatively permanent inhabitants of a *civitas* might include penitents, who would normally only remain for the term of their penance.¹⁸⁰ In monasteries, penitents coming from elsewhere appear not

¹⁷⁴ B. J. Graham, 'Early Medieval Ireland: Settlement as an Indicator of Social and Economic Transformation, c. 500–1100', in B. J. Graham and L. J. Proudfoot (eds.), *An Historical Geography of Ireland* (London, 1993), pp. 26–41, gives a clear and helpful account of early medieval urbanisation in Ireland and its relationship to the major monastic churches. A fundamental discussion is C. Doherty, 'The Monastic Town in Early Medieval Ireland', in H. B. Clarke and A. Simms (eds.), *The Comparative History of Urban Origins in Non-Roman Europe*, BAR International Series 255 (Oxford, 1985), 45–75.

¹⁷⁵ Adomnán, *VSC* i.20 (Derry).

¹⁷⁶ *Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchy, § 16; *Bechbretha*, ed. Charles-Edwards and Kelly, pp. 161–4.

¹⁷⁷ *CIH* 64.20 (*Bretha Comaithchesa*): each neighbour gives *diguin* to the others, meaning, apparently, a precinct within which there is to be no violence.

¹⁷⁸ *Hib.* xlv.2.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, xlv.5 (in the longer version in Recension B, as in Wasserschleben's note [e]). For commentary, see Doherty, 'The Monastic Town', 57–60.

¹⁸⁰ *Hib.* xlii.15 (a triad of things required of a church): 'a monk who has remained and has formed his manner of life there for many years, and a pupil who has been educated to the highest level of study, and a penitent who is leaving his penance [having finished the prescribed term]'.

to have been full members of the community.¹⁸¹ Among the latter there were not only the ordinary monks but also those with special skills, such as the monk-sailors of Iona whose knowledge of seafaring was a necessary condition for the continued prosperity of the community.¹⁸² As for an episcopal household, if the Tripartite Life's account of Patrick's household is any guide – provided that it is scaled down to fit more ordinary bishops – it had much of the variety of the royal household on which it was evidently modelled.¹⁸³

An ecclesiastical community was not restricted to one principal site. Here, however, one must take account of the early extension of monastic vocabulary to many aspects of ecclesiastical life and even to some in the secular sphere. The native word for a household, as we have seen, is *muinter*, probably from Latin *monasterium*; the service an ordinary lord expected from a client was *manchuine*, derived from *manach*, itself from Latin *monachus*. The lawyers treated the *manach* partly as an ecclesiastical client – he was free – and partly as a slave (*mug*), or half-free person, *fuidir*.¹⁸⁴ Because the *manach* was to his abbot what a client was to his lord, both the concept of a *manach* and that of an abbot were moulded by the analogy. The abbot could be any lord or head of an ecclesiastical community; it did not have to be monastic. A *manach* could be anyone who had subjected himself to the rule and discipline of an abbot; he was not always a monk in the sense of someone who had taken monastic vows of celibacy and poverty, as well as obedience. A properly monastic community would, however, have an inner core consisting of those who had taken such vows.

The eighth-century Life of Cainnech illustrates some of the possibilities. The saint's principal monastery was Aghaboe in the north of Osraige, although he also had a major presence in his native kingdom of Ciánnacht Glinne Geimin and even, later, a small church as far away as St Andrews in Fife.¹⁸⁵ The dependencies of a saint did not, however, include only other churches, as shown by a story in the Life.¹⁸⁶ Cainnech was travelling with his fellow-monks, apparently among the Ciánnacht Glinne Geimin, but suddenly disappeared. A few hours later he reappeared, and on being questioned, he revealed that he had gone to the

¹⁸¹ Adomnán, *VSC* ii.39: Librán was a penitent at Mag Lunge on Tíree for seven years; only subsequently did he take a monastic vow whereupon he was sent back to Mag Lunge as a full monk.

¹⁸² See below, pp. 298–9.

¹⁸³ *VT*² 3122–43, p. 155 (only in MS *E*); *Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchy, § 47: the bishop's company, *dám*, is of the same size as that of the king of a *túath*.

¹⁸⁴ T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'The Church and Settlement', in Ní Chatháin and Richter (eds.), *Irland und Europa*, pp. 171–5.

¹⁸⁵ *VT*² 1863–4; *Fél.*², Notes, 11 Oct.

¹⁸⁶ *Vita S. Cainnechi*, c. 13 (ed. Heist, *Vitae*, p. 185).

aid of one of his monks, Senach Rón. Senach had given Cainnech 'his body and soul, his lineage and his lands', but he had just been killed, apparently near his home in southern Leinster. Cainnech had gone to his rescue – not, as he was careful to point out, against Senach's earthly enemies but rather against the demons who would have dragged his soul off to hell, 'for it was more important to him to save the soul than the body'. Senach Rón had offered his land and his lineage; parallels suggest that lineage (*stirps*) means Senach's lineal agnatic descendants, the kindred of which he was to be ancestor.¹⁸⁷ They were to be Cainnech's monks and nuns, although they lived far from Aghaboe and were, for the most part at least, not celibate. How far such people were expected to follow a daily routine of communal prayer is uncertain. They cultivated lands which now belonged to the saint, and gave his heirs a share of the produce. In return they were the spiritual beneficiaries of the prayer of a community headed by Cainnech that was partly still in this world but increasingly, as the generations went by, in heaven.

Senach Rón's lineage may or may not have become the community of a church dependent on Aghaboe. An initial offering of one man with his land may sometimes have led to a large kindred supporting a church. Elsewhere, however, as we have seen when following Patrick's circuit of the northern half of Ireland, churches and their communities, not just individuals, could be subordinated to a saint.¹⁸⁸ If ordinary laymen or groups of laymen could offer land and lineage to a saint, craftsmen could offer hereditary skill and the descendants who would practise that skill; this was one way in which a *civitas* could become a place in which a variety of productive crafts found not just a market but also protection.¹⁸⁹ For them, an ecclesiastical *civitas* served the role performed elsewhere by the walled town.

The detached dependencies of a *civitas* were part of the community of prayer, but they also paid tribute or provided hospitality. Another category was distinguished by not being economically tied to a saint and his heirs: this comprised allied churches. One of the preoccupations of the eighth-century 'O'Donoghue Lives', predominantly of saints whose

¹⁸⁷ Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 15.2; *Addimenta*, 1.6.

¹⁸⁸ Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 21 (Imblech nÓnonn); *Vita S. Cainnechi*, c. 41 (ed. Heist, *Vitae*, p. 193), is a story to explain why Cell To Lue, the church of Do Lue (To Lue) Láebderc ('squinting'), apparently in southern Leinster rather than the better-known Killaloe, was subject to Cainnech.

¹⁸⁹ Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 22.1, describes Bishop Assicus as a copper-smith in the service of Patrick; and, according to 22.4, he was a monk of Patrick's but claimed by the *familia* of Columba and the *familia* of (Éogan of) Ardstraw. *Hib.* xxi.2, recognises the skilled *artifex* in his *donum* (= Ir. *dán* 'craft') as a person who may be called upon to give a judgement; but he was not necessarily living in a *civitas* (the king is also in the list).

principal churches were in the midlands around Slieve Bloom, was with such alliances.¹⁹⁰ The upshot of such connections can be seen in the *Martyrology of Tallaght*, in which a long list of St Munnu's monks (at Taghmon in Co. Wexford and perhaps also Taughmon in Co. Westmeath) were included as persons for whose salvation the community of Tallaght should pray.¹⁹¹ Adomnán's Life of St Columba suggests that such an alliance existed between Iona, Aghaboe (St Cainnech), Bangor (St Comgall), Clonfert and Ardfert (St Brendan moccu Altai), and that the friendship between the communities of Columba and Cainnech was especially close.¹⁹² Such alliances could be perceived in different ways: for example, the relationship of pupil to teacher, assimilated to that between foster-parent and foster-child, suggested a superiority without implying subjection;¹⁹³ the same was true of the relationship of a 'soul-friend' to the person whose spiritual direction was undertaken.¹⁹⁴ In these ways, some relationships of alliance were intermediate between the friendship of equals and relationships of subjection. A major monastery's external connections were thus extremely complex, embracing not just dependent churches, some of which were themselves monastic communities, but also kindreds with their lands and, finally, allied churches. The *familia* of a saint embraced the people belonging to his principal church, dependent churches and also dependent kindreds, while allies were perceived as independent *familiae*. The term *paruchia* was sometimes used collectively for churches and secular kindreds belonging to the *familia* apart from the principal church.¹⁹⁵ The *paruchia* differs from the *familia* because it does not normally include the principal church and because the *familia* is essentially composed of people, while the *paruchia* includes lands and dependent churches.

¹⁹⁰ For example, *Vita S. Fintani de Cluain Edhnech*, c. 3 (ed. Heist, *Vitae*, p. 146), where, however, Mochuimi Tire Da Glas is really the same person as Columba filius Crimthain: Cómán of Enach Truim, Fintan maccu Echdach (namely Fintan of Cluain Ednech) and Mo Chumme Tire dá Glas are described as *virī sancti, unum cor habentes*.

¹⁹¹ *Martyrology of Tallaght*, ed. Best and Lawlor, 21 October.

¹⁹² Adomnán, *VSC* iii.17 (the role of Cormac aue Liatháin is unclear – see n. 386 to Sharpe's translation – perhaps because according to the *Martyrology of Tallaght*, 21 June, he was 'in' that is, buried at, Durrow, a Columban church and was therefore not just an ally); for Cainnech in particular see Adomnán, *VSC* i.4, ii.13 (echoed in *Vita S. Cainnechi*, c. 28, ed. Heist, *Vitae*, p. 189); cf. also *Vita S. Cainnechi*, c. 27, where not just Columba and Cainnech, but also Comgall and Eógan of Ardstrow are allied.

¹⁹³ *Vita S. Ruadani*, c. 1 (ed. Heist, *Vitae*, p. 161); *Vita S. Columbae de Tír dá Glas*, cc. 4–5 (ed. Heist, *Vitae*, pp. 225–6). ¹⁹⁴ *Vita I. S. Lugidi seu Moluae*, c. 43 (ed. Heist, *Vitae*, p. 140).

¹⁹⁵ AU 787.5 (where the *paruchia* seems to mean the dependencies of Clonard, in this case within Munster); in *Hib.* xxxvii.20, the *clerici* are distinguished from the *parochia*, the latter probably standing for the community served pastorally by the church; cf. xlii.21 (title), where I take *uel* to be equivalent to 'and'. See further below, pp. 244–5.

CHAPTER THREE

Irish society c. 700: II. Social distinctions and moral values

Early Christian Ireland was a highly inegalitarian society. Indeed, the original Introduction to the *Senchas Már* expressed horror at the very notion of social equality.¹ Yet, although status was all-important, the early Irish laws explicitly recognised that there were several ways to achieve high rank. This acknowledgement that there were different sources of high status made it much easier to give a high social value to verbal and artistic skills and to learning; for that reason, the approach to status was a principal foundation-stone of early Irish culture. As we shall see, the treatment of the subject in the laws suggests that men whose own claim to high rank was through their learning used that very same learning to impose a comprehensive view of social status.

(1) THE PROBLEM OF INCOMMENSURABLE STATUS

In any inegalitarian society there is a need to have a comprehensive hierarchy of status, namely a system by which one person's status can be related to anyone else's. If rank is a essential part of any person's social identity, no one can be left outside the system. When someone was injured or killed, compensation was due, and the value of the compensation, including the conditions in which an injured person was treated, depended on the status of the victim and the rank of his kinsmen and lord.² But if there is division of labour and therefore diversity of social function, the different functions performed by people are likely to be incommensurable. An excellent doctor deserves higher status than an incompetent one, but there is no equally indisputable and transparent way to relate the excellence of the doctor to that of the farmer or the warrior.

¹ Introduction to the *Senchas Már*, § 3, ed. Thurneysen, *ZCP*, 16 (1927), 175, 179.

² *Bretha Crólige*, ed. Binchy, details the treatment given to an injured person while under medical treatment; *Bretha Déin Chécht*, ed. and tr. D. A. Binchy, *Ériu*, 20 (1966), 1–66, covers physical injuries; for the various forms of wergild, see *EIWK*, pp. 23–8.

Two strategies have been employed to escape from this quandary: on the one hand one may have a single criterion of status (for example, purity, as in the Indian caste system, or wealth). The consequence is that one is driven to accept that there are forms of personal excellence which will be irrelevant to status: choosing a single measuring rod implies that many qualities that entitle someone to esteem are not measured. If the strategy of the single measuring rod is adopted, therefore, there is likely to be an influential system of honour alongside formal status: personal excellence not measured by status can be given recognition by the more fluid standard of honour.

The other strategy is to have several measuring rods – separate hierarchies of status for each function – and then make more or less arbitrary decisions as to the relationship between one hierarchy and another. The early Irish lawyers followed this path. There was one hierarchy for the ordinary laity, namely ‘the farming people’, often called the ‘grades of the lay people’ as opposed not just to the Church but also to others whose rank derived from knowledge or skill.³ These, conveniently classified together as the *áes dána*, ‘people of skill (and knowledge)’, included several different hierarchies: the grades of the Church from doorkeeper up to bishop, or even ‘bishop of bishops’;⁴ the ranks of the learned poets and experts in Irish tradition, the *filid*; judges and lawyers; ecclesiastical scholars; craftsmen of various kinds. Both strategies have arbitrary elements, but their arbitrariness occurs at different points. With the first strategy, arbitrariness is there at the start, in the decision to treat one quality as the single decisive criterion of rank. With the second, arbitrariness is postponed until the different hierarchies, reflecting the various formally recognised forms of personal excellence, have to be brought into relation one with another. At that point, some decision has to be taken as to the relative status of those in the different hierarchies. The freedom of manoeuvre, and therefore the greater scope for political preference, lies in the areas of arbitrariness. The central issue in the early Irish politics of status was thus the relationship between hierarchies of rank.

The way the problem of arbitrariness was solved is not obvious – if it were, the sources would, unusually, be dwelling on the less justifiable, because more arbitrary, elements in their scheme. The solution perhaps stemmed from a parallel drawn between the persons at the top of the

³ *Crith Gablach*, ed. Binchy, § 1, line 4, § 2, line 6, § 3, line 10.

⁴ It is not clear that the Church was included among the *áes dána* rather than in a separate category. The term clearly applies only to craftsmen in *Uraicecht Becc*, *CIH* 2262.25, but the *olchenae* of line 24 makes it seem as though it could apply at least to the *filid*.

respective hierarchies: the king of an ordinary minor kingdom, his counterpart in the Church, namely the ordinary local bishop, and the *ollam* 'top person' among the poets.⁵ The easiest equation may have been that between the king of a *túath* and the bishop of a *túath*. This is suggested by further parallels when we rise above these local 'top people' to overkings and higher ranks of bishops. In a passage on the nature of a province, the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* draws an explicit comparison between the hierarchy of kings and the hierarchy of bishops.⁶ It offers an image of the proper, perhaps even ideal, province. It has two elements: on the one hand the proper province should have ten judges associated with ten *civitates*, by which was probably meant ecclesiastical communities; on the other, it should have 'one king and three lesser authorities [*potestates*] under him, and one bishop and other lesser ones'. The first characteristic, unsurprisingly in a text of canon law, looks to the Church and specifically to Church law. The second, however, draws a parallel between the Church and the laity, between the spheres of kings and of bishops. Interestingly, this chapter of the *Hibernensis* does not explicitly use the word 'king' of the 'lesser authorities' subject to the 'king'; similarly, when talking of the bishop, the standard is not the 'other lesser [bishops]' but the principal bishop of the province. He alone is openly a bishop; the others have that title only by the implications of the syntax. The very next chapter, however, looks at the ecclesiastical province in a slightly different light. It is not concerned with kings, but it has a province, again with judges, headed by a metropolitan bishop.⁷ This term, familiar from those countries still, or formerly, part of the Roman Empire, is here used for an Irish counterpart to the principal bishop of a province of the late Empire, and thus of the Church within that province. In another canonical text the term for a grander bishop is more Irish: he is 'a bishop of bishops'.⁸

For the Irish Church, therefore, there were different terminologies for the higher grades: on the one hand there was the universal Christian term, metropolitan bishop; on the other, there were terms such as 'bishop of bishops' which echoed vernacular terms (*rí rí* 'king of kings' or *rí ruirech*, 'king of great kings'). This double vision of the Church is evident elsewhere in the *Hibernensis*: in the first nine books the grades of the Church are given a detailed treatment based on Isidore's *De Officiis*, a treatment that stresses function and duty not status;⁹ on the other

⁵ On the term *ollam* see D. A. Binchy, 'The Date and Provenance of *Uraicecht Becc*', *Ériu*, 18 (1958), 48–51, 54; Idem (ed.), *Bretha Déin Chécht*, p. 50. ⁶ *Hib.* xx.2. ⁷ *Hib.* xx.3.

⁸ *Canones Hibernenses*, v. 9 (ed. Bieler, *Irish Penitentials*, p. 174).

⁹ The office of a bishop is a burden not an honour, *onus* not *honor*: *Hib.* i.1 c.

hand, Book 38, devoted to 'ecclesiastical teachers', *doctores ecclesiae*, probably a broad term covering the *scribae* and *sapientes* of the annals, opens with a detailed justification of their rights and status.¹⁰ Those other canonical texts, outside the *Hibernensis*, that use such terms as 'bishop of bishops' also show a much more open concern for ecclesiastical status in the terms current in lay society: the churchman has his honour-price, 'the value of his face'.¹¹ What one might call native and universal perceptions of the church hierarchy coexisted.

One possibility, therefore, is that the key to the equations of status that underlay the whole Irish system stemmed from conversion to Christianity: such equations were presupposed by the native perception of ecclesiastical hierarchy. It was necessary to produce an accommodation between the grades of the Church and the ranks of lay society; and this was done starting from the 'top person', *ollam*, both in the Church and the laity.¹² Another possibility, however, is suggested by the position of the learned poets, *filid*. The poet had, as one of his functions, to praise the various potentates of lay society. A natural corollary was that the more able and better-trained a poet was, the higher in rank should be the object of his praise (and the more generous the reward for the poem). In this congruity between the poetic quality of the praise and the social quality of both praiser and praised there was another route to an equation of status.¹³

At this point, however, a distinction is necessary. On the one hand, there is the unanswerable question about the original stimulus behind the creation of such a system of status based on more or less parallel hierarchies and the concomitant need to establish which ranks were equivalent. There is every possibility that Irish society had been hierarchical since time immemorial; certainly the archaeological record does not suggest a primitive egalitarianism of the kind hinted at, in tones of horror, by the Introduction to the *Senchas Már*. On the other hand, there is the question about what currently upheld the system of equivalent ranks – the system by which, for example, the same 'honour-price' was assigned to the king of a *túath*, the bishop of a *túath* and the *ollam* at the summit of the hierarchy of poets. And here there is the possibility that the grades of the Church may have provided the currently influential

¹⁰ *Hib.* xxxviii.1–3.

¹¹ *Canones Hibernenses*, iv *passim* and v.7–11 (ed. Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, pp. 170–5).

¹² Cf. the use of *ollam* in *Uraicecht Becc*, *CIH* 1617–18 = 2282.

¹³ King and *ollam* are juxtaposed as protectors of a *túath* in *Bretha Nemed* (BN) 11, ed. and tr. Breatnach, *Uraicecht na Ríar*, pp. 28–30. The *ollam*'s status is defined as that of a king of a *túath*, *CIH* 2270.25; similarly, the *dám* ('company') of a king of a *túath*, a bishop and a *súí* (probably an *ollam* of poets) is the same: *Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchy, § 47, lines 598–603.

model of Irish status, even though Irish society was probably hierarchical long before either Palladius or Patrick crossed the Irish Sea. It might well be true that Irish status had been recast because the grades of the Church had become the most ideologically acceptable example of an hierarchical system. This would then be the explanation of *Críth Gablach's* schoolroom question and answer:¹⁴

On what basis have the grades of the lay people been distinguished? According to the pattern of the grades of the Church; for it is right that every grade that exists in the Church should have its counterpart among the laity, on account of oaths of overswearing or exculpation, or witness or judgement from one to the other.¹⁵

From this need for equivalent ranks, *Críth Gablach* proceed to set out a list of seven lay ranks corresponding to the seven ranks of the Church.

In the very next sentence, however, it offers an alternative scheme:¹⁶

If it is according to Irish law, these seven grades are divided more minutely. What is the subdivision? The *bóaire* with his eight divisions, the *aire* of a clientela, the *aire* of violence, the high *aire*, the *aire* of leadership, the *aire* of superior testimony, the heir-apparent of a king and the king.

It then goes on to list the eight sub-divisions of the *bóaire*. As it turned out, this was the scheme *Críth Gablach* adopts in practice. As a result, although the Church's seven grades were, on *Críth Gablach's* testimony, influential in theory, that particular text did not follow them in practice.

Other texts, however, did. *Uraicecht na Ríar*, a lawtract probably of the second half of the eighth century, sets out a hierarchy of seven grades of learned poet, *filid*, to which are attached three sub-grades. This closely follows the similar scheme found in the *Hibernensis*, of seven grades of the Church, with three sub-grades.¹⁷ What is striking, therefore, is that the most complete theoretical correspondence is between the ranks of the *filid* and the grades of the Church. Contemporary learned analyses of Irish status perhaps concentrated, initially, not on lay society but on the learned poet and the churchman. Yet they did not attempt a similarly exact equation between the ranks of the ecclesiastical scholar, on the one hand, and the grades of the Church or of the *filid* on the other. Ecclesiastical scholars – *ecnai* or *sapientes* – were never given a single

¹⁴ *Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchy, § 2, lines 6–9.

¹⁵ That is, from Church to laity or *vice versa*.

¹⁶ *Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchy, § 3, lines 11–15.

¹⁷ See the discussion, *Uraicecht na Ríar*, ed. Breatnach, pp. 81–9. Books 1–7 of the *Hibernensis* describe the main grades, also listed in the *recapitulatio* in Book 8; Book 9 then deals (in the title) with the three sub-grades, the acolyte, psalmist and mere *clerici*; the *clerici* are covered in Book 10 (there is a more developed treatment of the sub-grades in the B Recension, which also adds a further book on the lay Christian).

set of consistently named ranks. The central effort was to attach the hierarchy of the *filid* to that of the Church.¹⁸

It might appear from the preceding discussion that such a failure to arrive at a full equation of the ranks of the different hierarchies would be fatal to the system as a whole. This was not, however, true, since there was a common language of status, 'the value of the face'.¹⁹ A man's face could be injured in many ways: as we have seen, invasion of privacy was one way to insult. A person's face could also be attacked with justification, above all by a true satire.²⁰ As the face was exalted by praise, so was it brought low by satire; and the poets openly boasted about the power of this weapon.²¹ Insult to the face, unless justified, entailed a right to compensation, but this varied according to the rank of the person concerned: the value of one man's face was not the same as another; the value of a woman's face depended on that of her male guardian, father, brother or husband.²² Independent status normally went with being the male head of a household, and hence women, children, and servants had dependent status.

Because there was this common language – the value of the face – there could be variation in detail and also variation in what was being measured. Since a bishop would usually have been a priest before he was a bishop, and a priest would normally have been a deacon, the hierarchy of the Church had, as one of its elements, a career structure according to which a person could progress up the ranks as he became more senior. This was even more true of the ranks of the *filid*, which corresponded to degrees of technical proficiency and learning.²³ Someone who became an *ollam filid*, chief poet, was expected to have learnt his craft over time, and in so doing, to have progressed up the ranks of the *filid*. On the other hand, the ranks of lay society had almost nothing to do with any career structure – though not quite nothing, since some ranks were assigned to the young.²⁴

(II) THE HIERARCHIES OF STATUS

The laws contain several lists of ranks. These correspond in their general shape and to some extent in their vocabulary, but the correspondence is

¹⁸ T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'The Context and Uses of Literacy in Early Christian Ireland', in H. Pryce (ed.), *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 68–9.

¹⁹ See especially, *Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchay, § 21.

²⁰ T. Ó Cathasaigh, 'Curse and Satire', *Éigse*, 21 (1986), 10–15.

²¹ *CIH* 1111–13; Kelly, *Guide to Early Irish Law*, pp. 43–4, 137–9.

²² *Críth Gablach*, § 11 (ll. 124–7).

²³ A principle frequently insisted on: e.g. *BN* iv, ed. and tr. Breatnach, *Uraicecht na Ríar*, pp. 36–8.

²⁴ The *fer midboth*, *inól*, *flescach*, *gairid* and possibly the *ócáire*. *EIWK*, pp. 347–9, 360–3.

Table 3.1. Críth Gablach on lay status

A. Kings	
1. <i>rí ruirech</i> , 'a king of great kings'	14 <i>cumala</i> 'female slaves'
2. <i>rí buiden</i> , ¹ 'a king of war-bands'	8 <i>cumala</i>
3. <i>rí túaithe</i> , 'a king of a people'	7 <i>cumala</i>
B. Non-royal lords (<i>flaithi</i>, or <i>airig</i> followed by a dependent noun)	
4. <i>aire forgaill</i> 'a. of superior testimony'	25 <i>séts</i> ²
5. <i>aire tuísea</i> 'a. of leadership'	20 <i>séts</i>
6. <i>aire ard</i> 'a high a.'	15 <i>séts</i>
7. <i>aire échta</i> 'an a. of vengeance'	—
8. <i>aire désa</i> 'an a. of a clientela'	10 <i>séts</i>
C. Commoners	
9. <i>aire coisring</i> 'an a. of constraint'	9 <i>séts</i>
10. <i>fer fothlai</i> 'a man of withdrawal'	8 <i>séts</i>
11. <i>mruigfer</i> 'a land-man'	6 <i>séts</i>
12. <i>bóaire febsa</i> 'a cow-a. of excellence'	5 <i>séts</i>
13. <i>aithech ara-threba a deich</i> 'a render-payer who farms with his tens'	4 <i>séts</i>
14. <i>ócaire</i> 'a young-a.'	3 <i>séts</i>
15. <i>fer midboth</i> 'man of middle huts' (14 to 20 years old)	two-year-old heifer
16. <i>fer midboth</i> (up to 14 years old)	up to a female yearling

Notes:

¹ Also described as 'the king of three or four peoples', *rí teora túath nó chetheora túath*, *Críth Gablach*, § 32, line 459.

² 15 *séts*, *cóic séoit deac*, in *Críth Gablach*, § 28, line 423, is a scribal slip; it should be 25 *séts*, *cóic séoit fichet*.

far from perfect. Many of the terms used will be obscure to the modern reader; he should not worry, for some were probably just as obscure to Irishmen in the eighth century. A selection of these lists will convey the elaborateness of the system, and both the extent of agreement and the anomalies and inconsistencies that remained (see tables 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3). *Críth Gablach* worked with a lay hierarchy divided between eight categories of noble (including kings) and eight categories of commoner – non-noble freemen (see table 3.1).

Some of the lists are based on the number seven, others on the number eight. As we have seen already, *Críth Gablach* perceived the list of seven grades as ecclesiastical in origin, while the list of eight was specifically lay. *Uraicecht Becc* and *Uraicecht na Ríar* (the former certainly, and the latter probably, Munster texts) used the number seven throughout. In this way they made it easier to equate the grades of the Church

Table 3.2. *Uraicecht na Ríar and Uraicecht Becc on poets and the laity*

<i>Uraicecht na Ríar on filid</i>		<i>Uraicecht Becc</i> on nobles (including kings) and commoners	
		['the king of Munster'	14 <i>cumala</i>]
1. <i>ollam</i>	40 <i>séts</i>	1. 'a king of great kings'	7 <i>cumala</i>
2. <i>ánruth</i>	20 <i>séts</i>	2. 'a king of one people'	3 ^{1/2} <i>cumala</i>
3. <i>clí</i>	10 <i>séts</i>	3. <i>aire forgaill</i>	30 <i>séts</i>
4. <i>cano</i>	7 <i>séts</i>	4. <i>aire ard</i>	20 <i>séts</i>
5. <i>dos</i>	5 <i>séts</i>	5. <i>aire tuísea</i>	15 <i>séts</i>
6. <i>macfuirmid</i>	4 <i>séts</i> ¹	6. <i>aire échta</i>	10 <i>séts</i>
7. <i>fochloc</i>	1 ^{1/2} <i>séts</i> ²	7. <i>aire désa</i>	7 <i>séts</i>
3 sub-grades:			
8. <i>taman</i>	1 ^{1/2} scruples ³	8. <i>bóaire tuísea</i>	5 <i>séts</i>
9. <i>drisiuc</i>	1 scruple	9. <i>bóaire tánaise</i>	3 <i>séts</i>
10. <i>oblaire</i>	1/2 scruple	10. <i>fer midbad</i>	female yearling
		11. <i>gairid</i>	sheep
		12. <i>fílescach</i>	lamb/1 <i>míach</i>
		13. <i>inól</i>	? ^{1/2} scruple

*Notes:*¹ 3 *séts* in *Uraicecht Becc*, *CIH* 227.18.² One *sét* in *Uraicecht Becc*, *CIH* 2170.37.³ On the assumption that *Uraicecht na Ríar*, § 18, l. 63, 'Lethscrepul a díre' should be emended to 'Screpul 7 lethscrepul a díre'. Otherwise the *taman*'s honour-price would be lower than that of the *drisiuc*.

with the ranks of the poets and of lay society. On the other hand, these equations worked very differently. The grades of the Church were equated with the ranks of the lay nobility (including kings); the grades of the poets, however, corresponded partly to noble and partly to commoner ranks. Thus the *dos* among the poets had an honour-price corresponding to the higher grade of *bóaire* ('cow-freeman', the standard free commoner).

The adoption of the schemes based on the numbers seven and eight caused difficulties. These are well illustrated by *Uraicecht Becc*'s treatment of kings. Whereas *Críth Gablach* and some other texts worked with three grades of king, *Uraicecht Becc*, in its main list of seven noble ranks, only has two.²⁵ The third and highest rank of king is brought in through the back door later in the text:²⁶ he was not part of the earlier list of seven grades and that is why he is placed within square brackets

²⁵ *CIH* 226g.²⁶ *Ibid.*, 2282.

Table 3.3. *Uraicecht Becc on kings, nobles and churchmen*¹

<i>Kings and nobles</i>		<i>Churchmen</i>
[‘the king of Munster’	14 <i>cumala</i>]	[<i>ollam úasalepscop/ollam mórchathrach</i>] ²
1. ‘a king of great kings’	7 <i>cumala</i>	<i>epscof</i>
2. ‘a king of one people’	3 ^{1/2} <i>cumala</i>	<i>sacart</i>
3. <i>aire forgaill</i>	30 <i>séts</i>	<i>deochain</i>
4. <i>aire ard</i>	20 <i>séts</i>	<i>subdeochain</i>
5. <i>aire tuiséa</i>	15 <i>séts</i>	<i>exorcistid</i>
6. <i>aire échta</i>	10 <i>séts</i>	<i>aistreóir</i> ‘doorkeeper’
7. <i>aire désa</i>	7 <i>séts</i>	<i>líachtreóir</i> ‘lector’

Notes:

¹ According to *Uraicecht Becc*, *CIH* 2269.35–7, the honour-prices of the grades of the Church were the same as those of the nobility.

² Adopting the reading in *CIH* 2282.27 in preference to 1618.7; these terms mean ‘supreme noble bishop’ and ‘supreme head of a great monastery’.

in table 3.3. Moreover, this highest rank of king, the provincial king or *rí cóicid*, here represented by the king of Munster, brings other dignitaries in his train (also placed within square brackets in table 3.3), personages who will be of considerable interest when we come to consider the organisation of the Church.²⁷ The first is not unexpected, the ‘noble bishop’ (*úasalepscop*); both the *Hibernensis* and other canonical texts show, as we have seen, that not all bishops were of the same rank. But then the lawtract continues with the ‘head [*ollam*] of a great church’, a phrase illustrated by the examples of Cork and Emly, two major Munster monasteries. *Uraicecht Becc* thus introduced a conception of the status of institutions and so of the derivative status enjoyed by the heads of those institutions. Even if the head of a great church such as Emly, the principal church of the Éoganachta, were himself not of episcopal rank, he would have as high a status as a ‘noble bishop’ by virtue of the rank of his church.

This statement flows from a sentence earlier in the text. When it had listed the ranks of the nobility, it remarked, first, that status distinctions worked ‘according to the same pattern for the grades of the Church’, and then that the same pattern also obtained ‘for heirs of a church, according to the grades of the churches to which they are attached, although they do not themselves have the grades, provided that their

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2282 + 1618.

deserts be good otherwise'.²⁸ What it did not explain was how one should judge the rank of a church when the head of that church did not, on his own, have that rank. Nonetheless, in spite of the theoretical difficulty, this notion of the ranking of institutions plainly corresponded with reality. Tírechán, for example, divided churches into free and unfree churches, just as he might have categorised individual men.²⁹ Similarly, the distinction between the rank of an institution and the rank of its head was vital when it came to defending the status of a church from the consequences of the bad conduct of its head: his bad behaviour deprived him of the high rank flowing from the institution, but it did not permanently affect the ranking of the institution itself.³⁰

In the end, therefore, *Uraicecht Becc* analyses lay status in terms of the lay hierarchy of eight ranks; and, moreover, it even applies the lay system to the Church. What began, as in *Críth Gablach*, as a theoretical obeisance to the seven grades of the Church ended, again as in *Críth Gablach*, by abandoning the ecclesiastical model. That is not to say that the hierarchy of eight grades was a straightforward representation of social reality. There are also anomalies in *Críth Gablach*'s account of status. Although the author of *Críth Gablach* made a valiant attempt to analyse the nature of status in the Ireland of his day, the early eighth century, he was using certain ideas to make sense of reality rather than merely describing it. Similarly, the nature of the language used by the tracts on status shows that they are professional aids to dealing with reality rather than representations of it. Such terms as *aithech ara-threba a deich* 'base client who farms with his tens' are most unlikely ever to have been in normal currency.

That is not to say that the basis of the legal treatment of status was unreal. The relatively detailed treatment in *Críth Gablach* shows that its author perceived noble status as resting on the number of base clients that formed part of noble's retinue or *déis*.³¹ Other dependants, such as the half-free *bothach* 'cottager' and *fuidir*, who were perhaps 'subordinately dependent', were not entirely irrelevant, but were kept out of the main analysis. What mattered was the number of dependants who were obliged to deliver fixed annual food-rents; dependable clientship was thus the basis of nobility. All this was on condition that the lordship

²⁸ *CIH* 2269.35–2270.4.

²⁹ Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 24, 33, 51; similarly *Liber Angeli* (in *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, ed. Bieler), §§ 13, 17, 21; *Hib.* xlii.28–9.

³⁰ *Hib.* xxv. 10. c; L. Breatnach, 'The First Third of *Bretha Nemed Toisech*', *Ériu*, 40 (1989), § 4 (= *CIH* 2211.17–18). ³¹ Charles-Edwards, 'Críth Gablach and the Law of Status', 57–63.

exercised by the noble was of long standing: to enjoy full nobility it was necessary to be the third generation in a line of lords.³²

Commoners were distinguished by the resources of their farms, divided into four main categories: house (*tech*), land, a share in a plough-team (*arathar*) and livestock (*fóhud* or *búar*).³³ All adult non-noble freemen were perceived as men who had at least a share of a plough-team, who had inherited, or had the prospect of inheriting, land, and who received the bulk of their livestock from one or more lords. Inherited land enabled them to receive the complementary grant of livestock that made mixed farming possible; and from the mixed farm they 'fed their lords' with their annual food-renders. The principal divisions among the commoners were thus dictated by these material assets: the lowest standard grade (leaving aside all minors), the *ócaire*, had a single plough-ox; the *bóaire febsa* had half a plough-team; the 'strong farmer', the *mruigféir* or 'landman', had a full plough-team. Similarly, the size of the house varied. This was defined in terms of a single figure; the close correspondence between some of the details of *Críth Gablach's* account and the houses excavated at Deer Park Farms in Co. Antrim suggest that the former was thinking in terms of a round house.³⁴ The figure would then be the diameter of the house. This varied from the nineteen feet of the *ócaire's* house to the twenty-seven feet of the *mruigféir's*. Surprisingly, this variation was much greater than the corresponding variation in the size of noble houses: even the top grade of noble below the rank of royal heir-apparent, the *aire forgaill*, only had a house of thirty feet in diameter.

The general basis of *Críth Gablach's* view of status is thus clear enough. A non-noble freeman had the necessary land, buildings and farming equipment to be an independent farmer. What he lacked was enough livestock, and this he received from his lord. For the commoner, therefore, the primary focus was on the relationship between a man and his house and land; for the noble, however, the primary focus was on the relationship between the noble and his clients, above all his base clients on whom he could depend in the long term for renders and service. That this view reflected reality, at least in general, is shown by the usual term for a non-noble commoner – current in both legal and non-legal texts –

³² *Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchy, § 24, lines 335–6; *Cáin Sóerraithe*, § 4, ed. Thurneysen, *ŽCP*, 15 (1925), 245.

³³ Charles-Edwards, 'Críth Gablach and the Law of Status', 63–73.

³⁴ A. Hamlin and C. J. Lynn (eds.), *Pieces of the Past: Archaeological Excavations by the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland 1970–1986* (Belfast, 1988), pp. 44–7. Rectilinear houses were not unknown: *ibid.*, pp. 48–50 (Rathmullan).

aithech.³⁵ The literal meaning of this term was 'repayer', one who by his annual renders repaid the lord's original grant.³⁶

The half-free were seen in terms of deficiencies – ways in which their resources were inadequate to sustain full free status.³⁷ Sometimes half-free status could stem from committing a personal offence, but usually it was due to inadequate resources. A *fuidir*'s kindred lacked land; or else a *fuidir*'s kinship was itself defective so that inheritance did not provide him with an adequate holding. He might be adopted or of uncertain paternity or an alien without native kin. The deficiencies in the *fuidir*'s social position reveal, by contrast, what was expected of the normal freeman: as the *fuidir* was usually someone for whom inheritance within a kindred would not or could not offer sufficient land, so the freeman was one whose kindred enabled him to be a farmer on his own account with at least a share of a plough-team.³⁸

The accounts of status in the laws, above all in the most detailed text, *Críth Gablach*, present a broadly acceptable picture – intelligible at the time – alongside details which one can be fairly sure were familiar only to the lawyers themselves. The contrast is evident in the terms *aithech*, 'render-payer, base client', part of the ordinary Irish social vocabulary, and *aithech ara-threba a deich*, 'an *aithech* who farms with his tens', which describes a rank that was only a variant on the generally recognised *ócaire*, the lowest normal rank of adult freeman.³⁹ Different lawyers also had different views: *Críth Gablach* argued that noble status depended on the number of base clients in a lord's *déis* or retinue. *Míadslechtá*, on the other hand, presented an analysis in which one hierarchy, like the noble in *Críth Gablach*, derived from base clientship, a second depended on the size of a noble's military following, and a third was composed of lords of bondmen hereditarily tied to their lords (*senchléithe*).⁴⁰

A possible interpretation of this situation is that status frequently mattered to lawyers because they had to reconcile parties to a dispute in which the rank of the injured party or parties dictated, in general terms,

³⁵ E.g. *Cáin Síerraithe*, ed. Thurneysen, §§ 4, 7, 8; *Additamenta*, 8.3, ed. Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, pp. 172, 173.

³⁶ For the relationship between *ad-fen*, *aithe*, and *aithech*, see *Cáin Lánamna*, § 26, ed. and tr. Thurneysen, *Studies in Early Irish Law*, p. 54, where *aithe* means 'repayment'. For an example outside the laws, see *Additamenta*, 8.3 (ed. Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, pp. 172–3). ³⁷ *EIWK*, pp. 307–36.

³⁸ The distinction between the man who has a share in a plough-team and one who has none corresponds to the French distinction between *laboureur* and *manouvrier*. M. Bloch, *French Rural History: An Essay on its Basic Characteristics* (London, 1966), pp. 193–6. It was fundamental to all societies in which the plough was the normal instrument for cultivating the soil: Goody, *Production and Reproduction*, pp. 20–2, 33, 35. ³⁹ Charles-Edwards, 'Críth Gablach and the Law of Status', 71–2.

⁴⁰ *CIH* 583.7–584.26; Charles-Edwards, 'Críth Gablach and the Law of Status', 59–60.

the value of the compensation. The application of legal expertise gave the lawyer added authority in his role as go-between and arbitrator (often, probably, assisting with his expertise the political authority of the king).⁴¹ He could present a judgement of the status of the injured party which engaged with social reality and was yet above ordinary social discourse. The legal language of status was probably also more precise than ordinary social discourse; certainly it disposed of a formidable range of distinctions of rank and was based on close analysis of the sources of status. Once a crucial element of the dispute was removed from the language controlled by the disputants into a language controlled only by the lawyer, he might have the authority to induce them to make peace. That is certainly not to say that the lawyer's language of status was a grand mumbo-jumbo employed merely to impress. It embodied far too much careful thought to be so curtly dismissed. It might use terms that were not themselves part of everyday reality, but these terms were part of a sustained effort to understand that reality.

(III) HONOUR AND MORAL VALUES

The principal discourse in which status was handled was, as we have seen, centred on the value of the face, *lóg n-enech*. Status was perceived in terms which made it very close to honour: honour was the respect due to those whose conduct at least upheld their status. Yet status was also rooted in the material relations of client to land and of client to lord – the basis of lay status – and in the assertion that the sacred orders of the churchman, the learning of poet and scholar and the skill of the craftsman all conferred rank. Power was not the same as status: the king might have more power than the bishop, but he had no more status. In discussing early Irish honour and morality it will be convenient to employ the term 'order' not for a particular rank or grade, but for the different hierarchies of rank and the individuals whose status was governed by them. The ordinary clergy will thus be one order, the laity another, the *filid* a third and the ecclesiastical scholars, the *ecnai*, a fourth.

To describe the values of early Christian Ireland at all precisely is exceedingly difficult. This is partly because the evidence is often awkward to handle, but it is also because there is every reason to believe

⁴¹ Hence the need for the king, one of whose regular functions was to settle the disputes of his people or peoples (*coccertad tuath, Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchy, § 41, lines 544–5), to have his judge always at hand (*ibid.*, § 40, lines 535–7). On the judicial aspect of royal office see M. Gerriets, 'The King as Judge in Early Ireland', *Celtica*, 20 (1988), 29–52.

that rather different values governed the lives of men and women, as well as of men in the different orders of society. The values of a lay noble were often not the same as those of a churchman, and his were not the same as those of a *fili*. None of these members of the elite would have had the same values as a commoner, an *aithech*; for the latter what counted most was to be reckoned *trebar*, a good farmer and head of household.⁴² The ambiguities in his position are exemplified by the character of Crunnchu in the saga *Noinden Ulad*.⁴³ An otherworld woman (who turns out to be the goddess Machae) entered the house of a widowed commoner, Crunnchu mac Agnomain. The goddess effectively married herself to him, a marriage which brought him even greater economic prosperity than he had enjoyed before, but there was one condition – that he should never mention her name in public. This arrangement collapsed when Crunnchu went to an *óenach* ('fair', 'assembly'). While watching a horse-race, he boasted that his wife could run faster than the fastest horses in Ireland, the two horses of the king. The king commanded him to be seized and held until his wife came to bear out his boast; his wife, who was pregnant, came, outran the horses, but gave birth to twins, *emain*, by the finishing-post; hence the place-name Emain Machae (Navan Fort), 'The Twins of Machae'; and hence, also, the end of the marriage. A presupposition of this story is, then, that a mere commoner may come to grief when he leaves his fields for the highly public *óenach*. There he may attempt to compete with his aristocratic superiors – horses and, especially, boasting about horses being a perquisite of the nobility.⁴⁴ The 'value of the face' belonging to a mere commoner could only take so much exposure in the more competitive domains of the *túath*.

Early Irish literature had an almost entirely aristocratic intended audience. The bulk of surviving evidence thus bears upon the nobility rather than commoners; still less does it illuminate the values accepted among slaves. Yet because there were men with very different roles at the top of society, enjoying the same high status but for different reasons, there was never likely to be a single monolithic set of values but rather a continuous half-explicit moral debate among the different orders of

⁴² The *fer trebar* in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, § 19, lines 198–203, is, however, part of the same moral universe as Conaire, the king of Tara, whom he is careful not to shame.

⁴³ Ed. and tr. V. Hull, *Celtica*, 8 (1968), 1–42.

⁴⁴ *Fingal Rónáin*, ed. D. Greene in *Fingal Rónáin and Other Stories*, Medieval and Modern Irish Series, 16 (Dublin, 1955), lines 221–4; *Early Irish Lyrics*, ed. and tr. G. Murphy (Oxford, 1956), no. 38 (an ungenerous payment of a cow, characteristic of the commoner, the 'cow-airé', *bóaire*, as opposed to the expected payment of horses).

society. They might all, for the most part, speak the same moral language, but the values which they especially admired were likely to be different. And even within a single order there was not always a single consistent outlook. We have seen already how ecclesiastical rank could be treated very differently in different canonical texts. The first chapter of the *Hibernensis* might stress *onus*, 'burden, duty', rather than *honor*, 'rank', but others were unhesitatingly concerned with the latter.

A literary genre that is relatively easy to handle, at least in outline, is the one contemporaries sometimes called *admonitio*, in Irish *tecosc*, namely the explicit recommendation of certain forms of conduct and warnings against others. This was the genre that allowed Columbanus to tell a pope what he should do, imitating in the process the Briton Gildas telling kings, bishops and judges how they should behave.⁴⁵ It was a favourite vehicle adopted by Alcuin in his letters, whether to Charlemagne, to the distant monks of Mayo or to the Irish Church as a whole.⁴⁶ The reason why the genre can be easier to handle than many is that a text is usually addressed to a particular person or category of person. In the case of Columbanus' fifth letter, for example, it is clear that it is a particular pope to whom the *admonitio* is addressed, and the purpose of the letter is explicit. Rather less easy is generic *admonitio*, as in the Irish text *Audacht Morainn*, a text that expresses the advice of one order, *filiid*, to another, kings.⁴⁷ It purports to be the instructions of a *fili*, Morann, addressed to a king, Feradach Find Fechnach. These named persons were not, however, the actual author and reader. For one thing, they were characters taken from legendary prehistory;⁴⁸ for another, the text tells the reader what Morann ordered his messenger, Neire, to tell the king. The original transaction is portrayed as purely oral. There is a purported situation, within an oral context, and the actual one: an author, text and readership.

The ways the text works in its fictional and actual frameworks are,

⁴⁵ Columbanus, *Ep.* v, ed. and tr. Walker, *Sancti Columbani Opera*, pp. 36–57; and see below pp. 372–8.

⁴⁶ W. Edelstein, *Eruditio und Sapientia: Weltbild und Erziehung in der Karolingerzeit: Untersuchungen zu Alcuins Briefen* (Freiburg-im-Breisgau, 1965), pp. 34–6, 42–8, 68–75; Alcuin, *Epp.*, ed. E. Dümmmler, MGH, *Epistolae Karolini Aevi*, ii (1895), nos. 280, pp. 437–8, 287, pp. 445–6; tr. S. Allott, *Alcuin of York* (York, 1974), nos. 33, 34.

⁴⁷ *Audacht Morainn*, ed. and tr. F. Kelly (Dublin, 1976).

⁴⁸ Feradach Find Fechnach was claimed by the Laigin as one of their early kings who ruled over Tara: *CGH* i.8 (116 c 20). In Munster tradition, however, a king of the same name was the ruler of the Picts whose daughter, Mongfind, was the woman by whom Corc mac Luigdeach begat Coirpre Cruithnechán, ancestor of the Éoganacht Locha Léin: *CGH* i.195 (148 a 21–4). Since in *Audacht Morainn*, ed. Kelly, § 1, Feradach's mother is a Pict, the Leinster and Munster (Pictish) figures are probably different manipulations of the same tradition.

however, related. In the fictional setting, the king was the man who re-established the power of the true Irish over the *aithechthúatha*, 'the base-client peoples', who had earlier staged a highly successful revolt.⁴⁹ The conduct recommended to Feradach would, it was claimed, reinforce the power of 'the nobles of Ireland' over their subjects:⁵⁰ it was the blueprint of a polity, of the way the political society of Ireland was to be shaped. The king was thus the head of 'the nobles of Ireland'; his political conduct was to confirm their domination. The implication of the text is that this elite did not consist solely of the lay nobility; the *filid*, 'learned poets', who included Morann himself among their number, were part of the dominant group: their knowledge was essential if the military power of 'the nobles of Ireland' was to be maintained. The king's behaviour was thus to be directed towards the preservation of a culture and its bearers, not just towards reinforcing the power of his companions in war. Moreover, the *filid* of a legendary past probably represented all the learned orders in the Christian present. *Audacht Morainn*, therefore, addressed kings from the standpoint of the learned orders. Since kings were the summit of their own social order, that of the lay nobility, *Audacht Morainn* purported to be the words of the head of one order speaking to the head of another, an *ollam* to a king; and Morann and Feradach may then be understood as representing the whole orders of which they were the heads. By implication, therefore, *Audacht Morainn* was a *tecosc* or *admonitio* uttered by the learned orders as a whole to the military nobility. The text itself demands a wider interpretation: the instructions are 'for the protection of my kin';⁵¹ and here one must remember the hereditary, kin-based character of the Irish learned orders.⁵² In the epilogue, Neire is again instructed to go to Feradach Find Fechnach, but also 'to every ruler who rules justly'.⁵³

There is, however, something paradoxical about the instructions of Morann to Feradach. They are addressed to a king who, in the terms of the legend, was in the very process of reconquering Ireland on behalf of 'the nobles of Ireland', a king who reversed by force the revolt of the *aithechthúatha*, the 'base-client peoples'. Yet force is scarcely mentioned in

⁴⁹ *Audacht Morainn*, ed. Kelly, § 1; on the revolt of the *aithechthúatha*, see E. Mac Neill, *Celtic Ireland* (Dublin, 1921), chap. 5; R. Thurneysen, 'Morands Fürstenspiegel', *ZCP*, 11 (1917), 56–69 (verse and prose texts); T. Ó Raithbheartaigh, *Genealogical Tracts I*, Irish Manuscripts Commission (Dublin, 1932), pp. 107–14, 122–31 (texts from the Book of Ballymote and the Book of Fermoy).

⁵⁰ The *tigernai Érenn* had been destroyed by the *aithechthúatha*, except for Feradach himself; his return to power thus represented their triumph also: *Audacht Morainn*, ed. Kelly, § 1.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, § 2. ⁵² *Uraicecht na Ríar*, ed. Breatnach, §§ 3–4, 7–12.

⁵³ *Audacht Morainn*, ed. Kelly, § 63.

the text; and, when it is, this is almost always to condemn not to commend: 'Tell him, let him not redden many fore-courts, for bloodshed is a vain destruction of all rule and of protection from the kin for the ruler.'⁵⁴ The true or just ruler, the *fírfílaith*, and 'the wily ruler', *ciallfílaith*, are contrasted with 'the ruler of occupation with hosts from outside' and 'the bull-ruler', *tarbfílaith*.⁵⁵ The latter is the incarnation of disordered violence: 'The bull ruler strikes [and] is struck, wards off [and] is ward off, roots out [and] is rooted out, attacks [and] is attacked, pursues [and] is pursued. Against him there is always bellowing with horns.'⁵⁶ The other side of this concern for peace and stability may be the concern shown by several Saints' Lives at the violence deployed by rulers and their companions.⁵⁷

Audacht Morainn establishes a point which, though important, is unsurprising, given the constitution of the Irish elite as a set of parallel orders or hierarchies: an element in early Irish literature is the presentation by the learned to the lay nobility, headed by kings, of an image of society; this image was put forward as if it were favourable to the interests of the elite as a whole, but in fact it reflected more closely the aspirations of the learned orders, including the Church. Early Irish literature did not merely entertain or praise kings and nobles, it instructed them. It was the voice of one or more learned orders influencing the conduct of the lay nobility.

The element of *tecosc* or *admonitio* was widespread in early Irish literature, but it was not universal; and where it was present, the instruction was not always of one social order by another. Some *tecosc* texts were confined within a single order; examples are offered by some early monastic rules, attached to the *tecosc* genre by their style. The Rule of Ailbe even adopts the mechanics of the genre, since it represents the text as the message entrusted to a messenger and sent to the founder of another Munster monastery.⁵⁸ On the other hand, the Rule of St Carthach addresses its instructions to different offices and roles within and without the Church: it begins with the Ten Commandments and goes on to the duties of a bishop, an abbot, a priest, a 'soul-friend' or spiritual director, a monk, a *céle Dé* 'client of God' and a king.⁵⁹ *Tecosc* is

⁵⁴ Ibid., § 29. ⁵⁵ Ibid., §§ 58–62. ⁵⁶ Ibid., § 62.

⁵⁷ Cf. the role of Áed mac Bricc as peace-maker between kings: *Vita S. Aidi Killariensis*, cc. 8–9, ed. Heist, *Vitae*, pp. 169–70, c. 29, *ibid.*, p. 176.; for examples of the saint as the rescuer of men about to be killed by kings, see *Vita S. Caimnechi*, c. 41, *ibid.*, p. 193, *Vita I. S. Fintani*, c. 25, ed. Heist, p. 205.

⁵⁸ 'The Rule of Ailbe of Emly', ed. and tr. J. O'Neill, *Eriu*, 3 (1907), 92–115; tr. U. Ó Maidín, *The Celtic Monk: Rules and Writings of Early Irish Monks* (Kalamazoo, 1996), pp. 19–27.

⁵⁹ 'The Rule of St Carthage', ed. and tr. Mac Eclaise, *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, 4th series, 27 (1910), 495–517, tr. Ó Maidín, *The Celtic Monk*, pp. 61–73.

also an element within texts that are not themselves of the genre. *Scéla Cano meic Gartnán*, a ninth-century story about a seventh-century prince of Dál Riata, is consistent in recommending *ainmne*, 'patience', rather than impulsive action;⁶⁰ but it is also a tragedy of kin-slaying, of sexual love, of the ambiguities of honoured exile and the demands of generosity.

Narrative texts are, in some ways, the best sources for someone attempting to get a sense of the variety and subtlety of moral thought in Early Christian Ireland. Their authors needed to imagine the thoughts of different kinds of men, and even occasionally of women. If the *tecosca* tell us about the accepted values of learned men, the sagas tell us what the learned thought moved the unlearned to action; and since lay nobles were the brothers and cousins of churchmen, *filid* and judges, there was plenty of direct experience to feed imaginations. Yet, however promising early Irish literature may be as material for the historian of moral values, it cannot be said that this investigation has yet progressed very far, in spite of some valuable contributions.⁶¹ What follows is only an indication of what may, in the future, be done.

In Irish sagas of the eighth and ninth centuries, there is an antithesis between two moralities, heroic and prudential. The heroic is exemplified by the paragon among Irish heroes, Cú Chulainn. One of the rites of passage for an Irish noble was the first taking of arms. Before he had passed through this ritual, Cú Chulainn overheard the druid Cathbad (who was also, significantly, the father of the king, Conchobar) instructing his pupils. The subject was days of good and ill omen.⁶²

One of his pupils asked him for what that day would be of good omen. Cathbad said that if a warrior took up arms on that day, his name for deeds of valour would be known throughout Ireland and his fame would last for ever.

Cú Chulainn heard this. He went to Conchobar to ask for arms. . . .

Then Cathbad came to them and asked:

'Is the boy taking up arms?'

'Yes,' said Conchobar

'That is not lucky for the son of his mother,' said he.

⁶⁰ *Scéla Cano meic Gartnán*, ed. Binchy, lines 98, 141-3; T. Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Rhetoric of *Scéla Cano meic Gartnán*', in D. Ó Corráin *et al.* (eds.), *Sages, Saints and Storytellers: Celtic Studies in Honour of Professor James Carney* (Maynooth, 1989), pp. 233-50.

⁶¹ That this is generally true is pointed out by T. Ó Cathasaigh, 'Early Irish Narrative Literature', in McCone and Simms (eds.), *Progress in Medieval Irish Studies*, p. 55; nonetheless a model study of a text of great historical interest is T. Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Rhetoric of *Fingal Rónáin*', *Celtica*, 17 (1985), 125-44, together with his 'Varia III: The Trial of Máel Fhothartaig', *Ériu*, 34 (1985), 177-80, which corrects my earlier account, T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'Honour and Status in Some Irish and Welsh Prose Tales', *Ériu*, 29 (1978), 130-41.

⁶² *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, ed. O'Rahilly, pp. 19-20, 142-3.

‘Why, was it not you who instructed him?’

‘It was not I indeed,’ said Cathbad. . . .

‘It is indeed a day of good omen,’ said Cathbad. ‘It is certain that he who takes up arms today will be famous and renowned, but he will, however, be short-lived.’

‘A mighty thing,’ said Cú Chulainn. ‘Provided I be famous, I am content to be only one day on earth.’

What made Cú Chulainn famous – possessed of so honourable a face – was not just that, as a warrior, his capacities and his performance went far beyond the measure required of any Irish noble; it was also his carelessness of the consequences of his pursuit of fame. There was no calculation by which he reckoned that so much more fame would compensate for so much less life; all such calculation was swept aside. The refusal to put anything into the balance against the supreme and all-engrossing pursuit of fame was intrinsic to his heroism. He was an ascetic among a martial nobility.

Not everyone was expected to be so uncalculating; in particular, the druid Cathbad thought it entirely reasonable to balance shortness of life against enduring fame. His was a prudential morality to set against the heroic aspirations of Cú Chulainn. Cathbad may not, like the Utilitarians, have thought that only by calculating the consequences of an action could one decide whether it was good or bad, but he certainly thought such calculations were in order. It may seem, admittedly, as though Cú Chulainn was equally calculating, only he had a single aim, to have a fame that would endure for ever. His calculation was thus simpler than that of Cathbad. Within the terms of choosing days of good omen for various purposes, this interpretation is reasonable. Yet the true standpoint of Cú Chulainn was that the knowledge he had from overhearing the druid would help him to perform actions that were intrinsically heroic, whatever the consequences. The fame would be the reward rather than simply the consequence of the actions: the relationship between fame and action was one of justice, not merely of causality.

Certain ways of perceiving the human personality may be related to this opposition between heroic and prudential moralities. *Ciall* seems to be the word for calculating intelligence. Hence ‘the wily ruler’ of *Audacht Morainn*, the one who could defend his kingdom by wisdom and by cunning, was the *ciallfháith*. For the warrior, however, other qualities than *ciall* were usually uppermost. When Fer Rogain praised his foster-brother, Conaire, king of Tara, the man whom Fer Rogain himself was helping to bring to his death, he did so in terms of contrasts:

He is the noblest and the most exalted and the finest and the most powerful king that has come into the whole world. He is the gentlest and the kindest and the most humble king that has come there.

Great is the youth of the drowsy, simple-minded man until he applies himself to a deed of arms. If his ardour and his passion be aroused, though the war-bands of the men of Ireland and Britain be attacking him before the house, the sacking will not succeed as long as he is there.⁶³

What the *dibergaig*, the professional reavers, had to fear was Conaire's *bruth* and his *gal*, his ardour and his passion. These terms are associated with notions of boiling and of heat: they refer to the spiritedness of a man rather than his intelligence.⁶⁴ Another word for 'passion' was *gus*; this could be used in a martial context, but also, following the terms of the contrast in Fer Rogain's description, it could refer to natural, instinctive kindness. Conaire's grandfather directed his infant daughter to be exposed, but when his two slaves were putting her in a pit, the girl smiled at them, 'and their *gus* then came upon them' and they took her to one of the king's byres and reared her secretly.⁶⁵ The one natural instinctive spirit would enable a good man to be, in the words of *Tecosca Cormaic*, 'The Instructions of Cormac', 'mild in the mead-hall, stern in battle, weak towards the strengthless, strong towards the powerful'.⁶⁶

Natural spirit, however admirable in a warrior, needed instruction in a king. When Conaire became king, he did so by the stratagems of others. Although he was believed to be the son and the grandson of a king of Tara, 'the people of Tara' were appalled at the success of 'a young beardless lad'. He replied that there was nothing wrong in having a young and generous king, and when this promise of sweeteners to come brought them round to inaugurating him, he added the comforting remark, 'I shall enquire of the wise so that I may be wise myself.'⁶⁷ What was required of a king was both the ardour of the warrior and the wisdom which came from taking good advice from wise counsellors. For this reason, among others, the king was never to be without his judge, his *brithem*, even in the sowing month when all might wish to be at work in their fields.⁶⁸

The demands made upon the king in those texts that set out the fundamental basis of the political order in the eighth century centred on the

⁶³ *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, ed. Knott, § 102, lines 1070–2, 1079–82.

⁶⁴ M. Dillon, 'The Semantic History of Irish *Gal* "Valour; Steam"', *Celtica*, 8 (1968), 196–200.

⁶⁵ *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, ed. Knott, § 5, lines 74–9.

⁶⁶ *The Instructions of Cormac mac Airt*, ed. and tr. K. Meyer (Dublin, 1909), pp. 16–17.

⁶⁷ *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, ed. Knott, § 15, lines 160–7.

⁶⁸ *Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchy, § 40, lines 535–8.

notion of ‘the truth [or the justice] of the king’.⁶⁹ The requirement was, at least in theory, rigorous: the opposite of a just ruler was an ‘un-ruler’.⁷⁰ The quality that expressed his justice or truth most clearly was his capacity to judge justly. What put Mac Con out of the kingship of Tara, and placed Cormac mac Airt in his place, was the one and only unjust judgement passed by Mac Con and its correction by Cormac.⁷¹ How far this severe standard ought to endear the king to the services of his judge was implied by a lawtract, *The False Judgements of Caratnia*. Caratnia was the judge of Conn Cétchathach, ancestor of the Connachta and the Uí Néill. The text is a collection of judgements made by Caratnia in private to Conn, all of which are denounced as unjust by Conn, but turn out to be just after all. Conn’s reaction is not perceived as ill-intentioned: the cases all had something exceptional about them that induced Caratnia to pass an unexpected judgement. The implication of the text is, therefore, that, however just the intentions of the ruler, he could not expect to be just in practice without learned advice. Natural instincts were not enough.

One might think that this stress on the justice of the ruler applied only to kings, not to other nobles, but this is not the case. Every lord had an obligation not to be a ‘false-judger’ (*gúbrethach*); if he was, his client, on whose clientship he depended for his very nobility, might terminate the relationship without penalty.⁷² In the view of the learned orders, therefore, the political health of society depended on their advice being asked for and given. It was to be assured by what was said in the secret council (*sanas*) of the king, and also by the attentiveness of nobles in general to the instructions of the wise.

⁶⁹ *Scéla Éogain 7 Cormaic*, ed. and tr. T. Ó Cathasaigh, *The Heroic Biography of Cormac mac Airt*, pp. 122–3; also ed. and tr. O Daly, *Cath Maige Mucrama: the Battle of Mag Mucrama*, §§ 17–19, pp. 70–3.

⁷⁰ *Audacht Morainn*, ed. Kelly, § 54, line 128 (the use of ‘un-ruler’ for ‘evil ruler’ implies that conduct contrary to the instructions of Morann was the negation, not just the perversion, of rulership); for the *rí gúbrethach* see *CIH* 234.4.

⁷¹ *Scéla Éogain 7 Cormaic*, pp. 122–3.

⁷² *Cáin Aicillne*, ed. Thurneysen, §§ 55, 58 (and cf. § 52); cf. *CIH* 16.1; 26.10.

CHAPTER FOUR

Ireland and Rome

(I) FROM THE LATE IRON AGE TO EARLY CHRISTIAN IRELAND

The present state of archaeological research suggests that there was something akin to a Dark Age in Ireland during the centuries before Christian conversion.¹ This period – from the first century BC to the fourth century AD – may, for convenience, be called the Late Iron Age.² It coincided, for the most part, with the Roman Empire: its beginning came as Roman power was being extended further into Gaul and it came to an end in the late Empire, when imperial frontiers were under attack by, among others, the Irish. A problem is posed, therefore, by this chronology: was the coincidence between Roman power and this Irish Dark Age a mere coincidence, so that a low ebb of farming activity and artefactual output just happened to endure while Roman power in north-western Europe was at its peak? Since this history of Early Christian Ireland takes its starting-point from the beginning of organised Christian missionary activity in Ireland, the crucial aspect of this problem is a more particular question: why was it that an economic revival and a vastly increased impact of Roman civilisation occurred when the power of Rome in north-western Europe was in terminal decline? Yet, although this latter question alone is directly relevant, it may perhaps only be answered as part of the larger problem about the relationship of Ireland and Rome. Furthermore, it needs to be remembered that the problem is one posed by the present state of published archaeological research. Major new finds might quickly alter the appearance of the evidence.

First, however, we need to consider in what sense there may have been

¹ D. A. Weir, 'Dark Ages and the Pollen Record', *Emania*, 11 (1993), 21–30, remarks of the period 100 BC–200 AD that 'if a single period was to be termed a Dark Age, the author would propose that this is it'. See also M. G. L. Baillie, 'Dark Ages and Dendrochronology', *ibid.*, 5–12, esp. 9–10.

² For a general survey see B. Raftery, *Pagan Celtic Ireland: The Enigma of the Irish Iron Age* (London, 1994).

an Irish Dark Age during the lifetime of the Roman Empire. In Early Christian Ireland, the great provincial kingships were thought to reside in special 'seats of kingship', Crúachain, Ráith Ailinne, Emain Macha, Cashel and, above all, Tara.³ Two of these, Emain Macha (Navan Fort, Co. Armagh) and Ráith Ailinne (Knockaulin, Co. Kildare) have been excavated in the last generation;⁴ moreover extensive survey work has been carried out in and around Crúachain (Rathcroghan, Co. Roscommon).⁵ Cashel probably stands apart from the others: the name is a Latin loanword (< *castellum*) and an Old Irish origin-legend portrayed it as a site established late in prehistory, whereas the others were thought to be of great, if not immemorial, antiquity.⁶ Of the remaining four, then, leaving aside Cashel, two are reasonably well understood archaeologically and there is considerable evidence for a third. Only in the case of Tara is there little detail derived from modern published excavation.⁷

The current understanding is that these sites were religious and that after long, but not continuous, use, Emain Macha, at least, came to a relatively sudden end in the first century BC. The suggestion has been made, therefore, that the Old Irish perception of them as 'seats of kingship' and as immensely ancient was only partially correct. It was correct in that they were ancient, but incorrect in that they were religious sites and not royal fortresses; it was also incorrect in that they did not remain in use up to the beginning of the Christian period in Ireland. It used to be argued, first, that Armagh was chosen by Patrick as the site of his church because it was adjacent to Emain Macha, and, secondly, that Emain Macha itself was still the capital of a larger Ulster in the fifth

³ For the 'seat of kingship' see below pp. 473–481.

⁴ D. M. Waterman, *Excavations at Navan Fort, 1961–71*, completed and ed. C. J. Lynn (Belfast, 1997); Mallory and McNeill, *The Archaeology of Ulster*, pp. 146–50; C. J. Lynn, 'Navan Fort: A Draft Summary Account of D. M. Waterman's Excavations', *Emania*, 1 (1986), 11–19; idem, 'The Iron Age Mound in Navan Fort: A Physical Realization of Celtic Religious Beliefs', *Emania*, 10 (1992), 33–57; idem, 'That Mound Again: The Navan Excavations Revisited', *Emania*, 15 (1996), 5–10; B. Wailes, 'The Irish "Royal Sites" in History and Archaeology', *CMCS*, 3 (Summer 1982), 1–29; idem, 'Dún Ailinne: A Summary Excavation Report', *Emania*, 7 (1990), 10–21.

⁵ Herity, 'A Survey of the Royal Site of Cruachain in Connacht. I'; idem, 'A Survey of the Royal Site at Cruachain in Connacht. II'; idem, 'A Survey of the Royal Site of Cruachain in Connacht. III'; J. Waddell, 'Rathcroghan – a Royal Site in Connacht', 'Rathcroghan in Connacht'.

⁶ While Crúachain, Tara and Emain Macha were grouped together as early, probably, as the seventh century in *CGH* i.8 and 23, Cashel was not; according to 'The Story of the Finding of Cashel', ed. M. Dillon, *Ériu*, 16 (1952), 61–73, it was a new foundation associated exclusively with the Éoganachta; cf. D. A. Binchy, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship* (Oxford, 1970), 38–41.

⁷ E. Bhreathnach, *Tara: A Select Bibliography*, Discovery Programme Reports 3 (Dublin, 1995), pp. 140–45; the excavations by S. P. Ó Riordáin and R. De Valéra 1955–9 have not been fully published.

century.⁸ On this view Emain Macha was a royal site and remained so until the conquests of the Uí Néill in the fifth century. Any such theory is incompatible with the date now available for the destruction of Emain Macha.⁹ The crucial phase within the long history of this site arrived with the construction, from *c.* 100 BC, of a circular building about 40 metres across. This was built with 275 posts in six concentric rings with a very large oaken post at the centre. The tree from which the central post was made was cut down *c.* 95 BC, and the central post seems to have been the last to be erected. Nothing was found in the excavations to suggest domestic use, and it has been interpreted as a temple. Within the next hundred years the entire structure was destroyed with a deliberate and systematic leisureliness that suggests that it was done by the people of the area rather than by an invading army. From that time onwards there was no large-scale building activity on the site.

It may be dangerous to make too definite a contrast between religious and secular or between priestly and royal sites. The very scale of these sites implies a close link between religious authority and the power to deploy labour. The capacity to organise labour at a level which may have been that of entire peoples is unlikely to be separate from military power. A good parallel is offered by the story in Cogitosus, *Vita S. Brigitae*, c. 30, of the construction of a road across bogland – a togher – in which sections of the work were allotted by the king (apparently the king of Leinster) to different peoples within the province, and then to their constituent kindreds and households.¹⁰ Needless to say there was much complaint that the more powerful peoples had seen to it that the king imposed the more difficult stretches on the weaker peoples. While, therefore, they were religious sites rather than fortresses (although a military function is suggested by the early Irish name Ráith Ailinne, ‘fort of Ailenn’),¹¹ they were not thereby non-royal.¹² The tendency of modern scholars to place religion in one compartment and secular power in another is a poor guide to the Iron Age. A better indication of their function than the name Ráith Ailinne is, perhaps, Emain Machae, ‘The Twins of Machae’, referring to a mythological story about a marriage

⁸ Binchy, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship*, 34–5.

⁹ For a summary see Mallory and McNeill, *The Archaeology of Ulster*, pp. 146–50.

¹⁰ Cogitosus, *Vita S. Brigitae*, tr. Connolly and Picard, c. 30.

¹¹ It is usually known to modern scholars as Dún Ailinne, as in the Mid.Ir. gloss on Broccán’s Hymn, *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus*, ed. Stokes and Strachan, ii.344, but Ráith Ailinne at AU 770.8. Both of these names suggest a military function.

¹² This is recognised by Lynn’s theory of a threefold function: ‘That Mound Again’, 5–10.

between a goddess, Machae, and a wealthy Ulster farmer.¹³ This story suggests that Emain Machae, although sometimes interpreted in the early Christian period as a fort, was also seen as the site of an *óenach* with pre-Christian religious associations.

The configuration of power and culture that sustained these sites at their height seems to have come to an end between the first century BC and the first century AD.¹⁴ From that time until the fourth century relatively little artefactual evidence has been discovered, although there appears to have been more continuing activity both at Tara and at Ráith Ailinne than at Emain Macha.¹⁵ Such objects as exist, such as the Bann disk, discovered by the lower River Bann, demonstrate the highest aesthetic taste and metal-working skill.¹⁶ What appears to have been lacking is quantity not quality. This suggests that the problem lay with the patrons not with the craftsmen – namely, that the political capacity to employ more fully the skills available was lacking.

A decline in human settlement seems to have set in rather earlier than the first century BC. The pollen data suggest that the impact of human activity upon the flora around the bogs from which the pollen came was less between *c.* 200 BC and *c.* 300 AD than either before or after.¹⁷ Much of the good land in Ireland had been cultivated for a millennium or more before Emain Macha and Ráith Ailinne were destroyed. As in the rest of north-western Europe, major clearance of the forest goes back to the Neolithic period, long before the historical era. What occurred around the fourth century AD was not, therefore, so much new clearance as a recovery from the previous four hundred years.

The fourth century also emerges as an important turning-point from

¹³ *Noínden Ulad*, ed. Hull, 1–42.

¹⁴ That is, the end of the major religious buildings: at Dún Ailinne this is the excavator's 'mauve phase' (Wailes, 'Dún Ailinne: A Summary Excavation Report'). A problem at this site is that, whereas datable artefacts lie between the first century BC and the first century AD, the radiocarbon evidence ranges between the fifth century BC and the third century AD. The third-century AD date could not be brought into relation with the stratigraphy and reuse or redeposition could not be ruled out.

¹⁵ See forthcoming publication of excavations of the 'Rath of the Synods' at Tara; for Ráith Ailinne see previous note.

¹⁶ The Bann disk is in the Ulster Museum, Belfast; it is no. 793 in B. Raftery, *A Catalogue of Irish Iron Age Antiquities*, 2 vols., Veröffentlichung des vorgeschichtlichen Seminars Marburg, Sonderband 1 (Marburg, 1983). Similar objects are the bronze disk from Monasterevin, Co. Kildare, and the bronze object, without provenance, known as the 'Petrie Crown': M. Ryan (ed.), *Treasures of Ireland: Irish Art 3000 BC – 1500 AD* (Dublin, 1983), nos. 35–6.

¹⁷ F. Mitchell, *The Irish Landscape* (London, 1976), pp. 159–65; idem, *The Shell Guide to Reading the Irish Landscape* (Dublin and London, 1986), pp. 144–52, followed by Raftery, *Pagan Celtic Ireland*, pp. 121–2. There seems to be doubt as to whether the decline set in before the first century BC.

another kind of evidence, the so-called 'ringfort' or *ráith*.¹⁸ In the view of some archaeologists, ringforts were designed to offer protection against cattle-raids; according to others, most were not forts but rather farming and habitation sites enclosed by a bank and ditch. On the latter view, the usual word for the ordinary ringfort in Old Irish was probably *les*, whereas only the grander, sometimes multivallate, examples probably merited description as *ráith* or *dún*, 'fort'. By 'fort' is here understood a defensive structure capable of resisting, or delaying for a considerable period, an attack by a sizeable force; it is not disputed that an ordinary *les* may have defended the inhabitants from small-scale attacks by predators, whether human or animal.¹⁹ The *les* was both the enclosing ditch and bank and also the area and buildings enclosed. The function of the enclosing bank and ditch was not only to help in the management of livestock, but also to demarcate an area over which the owner of the *les* had exclusive rights. In the order of a hundred ringforts have been excavated. These excavations suggest that they were the centres of farms and were usually inhabited by a single nuclear family together with dependants.²⁰ The same conclusion also emerges from the legal evidence: the area within the *les* was private space, intrusion into which could be penalised – not as private as the house itself, but a person from outside was expected to ask permission to enter.²¹

The difficulty in seeing the humbler ringforts as designed to repel cattle-raiders is their uneven distribution. If this was their purpose they should have been most common where there was the greatest risk of such raids. To take a relatively well-attested case, one would expect there to be a markedly dense distribution of ringforts on or near the northern frontier of Leinster as compared with south-east Leinster. The area around Maynooth should have had a dense distribution; the area around Rosslare should not. There is, however, no such contrast.²² The densest area is in Co. Sligo, which did see some serious fighting, as in 703, but not as much as northern Leinster.²³

There are more elaborate examples, with more than one enclosing

¹⁸ M. Stout, *The Irish Ringfort* (Dublin, 1997), esp. pp. 22–31. A clear summary account is given by B. J. Graham in Graham and Proudfoot (eds.), *An Historical Geography of Ireland*, 44–8. *Ráith* is often anglicised as 'rath'.

¹⁹ For this issue, and references to the literature, see Stout, *The Irish Ringfort*, 19–20.

²⁰ Hamlin and Lynn, *Pieces of the Past*, pp. 44–7.

²¹ *Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchy, lines 209–13.

²² See Stout, *The Irish Ringfort*, pp. 59–64; note that the main concentration in Co. Wexford is south of a line from New Ross to Wexford Harbour (*ibid.*, p. 64); it is hard to see how this can be made to fit the cattle-raid explanation.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 93–7; AU 703.2.

ditch and bank in a concentric pattern.²⁴ Some of these may have had defensive capability and could be called *dún* or *ráithi*, as for example, were *Ráith Mór* and *Ráith Becc*, both attested royal forts in Mag Line (north-west of Belfast).²⁵ Two very different but probably complementary pieces of written evidence for the *dún* or *ráith* are provided by the eighth-century *Life* of Áed mac Bricc (the saint of Rahugh, *Ráith Áeda maic Bricc*, and Killare) and by the early eighth-century legal tract, *Críth Gablach*. The passage from the *Life* runs as follows:

One day there came to St Áed a person whose skill was to dig the ground and to surround important settlements [*civitates*] with walls. He said to the holy man, 'Do you know of someone who needs to have his settlement surrounded with walls?' Áed replied to him, 'Go off yonder to a friend of mine and perform your work with him, and you will receive a reward from him.' He therefore went to that man, and with him he dug the ground and made a triple wall around his fort [*arx*], which is called *Ráith Bailb*.²⁶

The friend's *civitas* (perhaps equivalent to *les* here) was made into a tri-vallate *arx* or *ráith*. The patron was 'a rich man' (*dives*), able to reward the expert in fortification with enough cattle to fill the fort. The *Life* gives the initial impression that help from others was only called upon when it came to paying the *ráith*-maker for his work; but *Críth Gablach* shows that this is almost certainly untrue. One of the duties of the base clients of the king was to help with the construction of his *dún*.²⁷ In a vivid phrase it declares: 'It is then that he is a king, when the labour-dues of base clients surround him.'

It then goes on to define what this particular labour-due is: a measured portion of the rampart and ditch. The direct implication is that there was a correlation between the number of base clients a lord had and the size of his *dún*. Nobles in general, not just the king, had base clients, and the number of such clients defined the status of the noble.²⁸ A humble *aire désa* had only ten base clients, whereas an *aire forgaill*, probably a member of a royal dynasty, had forty. The grander *dún*, though

²⁴ A good example is Garranes, Co. Cork (Lisnacaheragh, w 473 640), a tri-vallate ringfort with elaborate defences at the entrance, occupied from c. 500, perhaps for not much more than a century: S. P. Ó Riordáin, 'The Excavation of a Large Earthen Ring-Fort at Garranes, Co. Cork', *PRIA*, 47 c (1942), 77–150 (incl. J. Ryan, 'Historical Addendum', pp. 145–50).

²⁵ *Ráith Mór*: AU 682.2; J 19 87, now the townland of Rathmore in Kiltene parish; *Ráith Becc*: AT, CS 565 (the death of Diarmait mac Cerbaill); approximately J 18 88, now a townland in the parish of Donegore. See Reeves, *Ecclesiastical Antiquities*, 69–70, 278–81. Many of the multivallate ringforts may have had their ditches for social display: Mallory and McNeill, *The Archaeology of Ulster*, pp. 197–200. ²⁶ *Vita S. Aidi Killariensis*, c. 13 (ed. Heist, *Vitae*, p. 171).

²⁷ *Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchey, § 45, lines 566–72.

²⁸ Charles-Edwards, 'Críth Gablach and the Law of Status'.

not every *dún*, are likely to have been royal.²⁹ For similar reasons, the crannóg, or lake-fort, which needed a great deal of labour on its foundations, seems often to have been a royal dwelling.³⁰

Something in the order of 60,000 ringforts still survive in Ireland; others have been destroyed by ploughing. According to some archaeologists the density of these sites is such, especially in such areas as Co. Down – which has about 1,300 ringforts and has been well surveyed – that they must have been the normal farms of free peasants.³¹ Others maintain that individual sites were probably only inhabited for about a century, that some were never inhabited at all, being used instead as cattle-enclosures, and that the number in human occupation at any one time may have been as few as 10,000.³² From this assessment of the evidence it is argued that the ringfort was normally the preserve of the nobleman. The other view, however, holds that there is little grouping of sites in such areas as Co. Down, of a kind that would suggest replacement. In other words, it is suggested that, if a given ringfort were only occupied for a short period, there should have been clusters of forts of different dates, so that, as one was abandoned, another, nearby, was constructed. Such clusters are not the norm, although there are some examples, and therefore the hypothesis fails.³³ From an historian's standpoint, this issue is of major importance. If, as one side holds, the ringfort was normally the preserve of the nobility, one would wish for evidence of other types of site in which the non-noble population lived; moreover, such sites as that at Deer Park have reasonably been interpreted as the farms of non-noble freemen.³⁴

²⁹ R. B. Warner, 'The Archaeology of Early Historic Irish Kingship', in S. T. Driscoll and M. R. Níe (eds.), *Power and Politics in Early Medieval Britain and Ireland* (Edinburgh, 1988), pp. 47–68, which concentrates especially on Clogher, Co. Tyrone (the royal seat of *Sil nDaimíni*).

³⁰ The best-known example is Lagore: AU 786.6; 805.6; H. O'N. Hencken, 'Lagore, a Royal Residence of the Seventh to Tenth Centuries', *PRIA*, 53 c (1950–1), 1–247. Similarly, the seat of kingship of the *Uí Nad Slútaig* kings of Fernmag in the ninth century was Loch Úaithne (Lough Ooney, H 560 300), presumably a crannóg, though nothing remains above the surface: AU 851.6 (where the *Conailli* of Fernmag were a subject people within the kingdom). For a good general survey see B. J. Graham in Graham and Proudfoot (eds.), *An Historical Geography of Ireland*, pp. 42–3, who concludes that crannógs 'almost certainly evolved between the fifth and seventh centuries' (p. 42).

³¹ Malory and McNeill, *The Archaeology of Ulster*, pp. 200–4.

³² H. Mytum, *The Origins of Early Christian Ireland* (London, 1992), pp. 109–10, 152–9.

³³ Examples of clusters are: Cush, Co. Limerick: S. P. Ó Riordáin, 'Excavations at Cush, Co. Limerick', *PRIA*, 45 c (1940), 83–181 (cf. Mytum, *The Origins of Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 109–11); Ballypalady, Co. Antrim: D. M. Waterman, 'The Group of Rathes of Ballypalady, Co. Antrim', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 35 (1972), 29–36. M. Stout, 'Ringforts in the South-West Midlands of Ireland', *PRIA*, 91 c (1991), 201–43, argues that occupation was long-term, and thus, where there are clusters, this was not due to rapid replacement of one ringfort by another.

³⁴ For Deer Park Farms (grid ref.: D 288 088), see Hamlin and Lynn, *Pieces of the Past*, pp. 44–7.

If there was a period of reduced settlement and economic activity in the period corresponding to the early and middle Roman Empire, this may have some connection with another piece of evidence from a quite different source. The geographer Ptolemy, writing in the second century AD, has an account of the peoples of Ireland; his sources, however, may be of earlier date.³⁵ The next information on the peoples of Ireland comes from ogam inscriptions (the earlier ones are probably of the fifth and sixth centuries). What is striking, when these two types of evidence are compared with one another and with the more plentiful sources of the seventh and eighth centuries, is how little continuity there is between Ptolemy's Ireland and the Ireland of the fifth, let alone the eighth century. One of the few names to be found in Ptolemy which also survived into the historical period is that of the Ulaid, the Ulstermen, who are Ptolemy's Ouolouñtioi.³⁶ The possibility is that the Late Iron Age in Ireland was a period of political instability as well as of reduced farming activity. This might explain a reduced artefactual output.

The assumption will, therefore, be made that there was a real difference between the scale of activity, in terms of settlement and of the production of durable artefacts between the Late Iron Age on the one hand and the Early Christian period on the other. The two most important categories of evidence are the pollen data and the *les* or ringfort. These seem to be the most secure, whereas the artefactual evidence could change rapidly as a result of new discoveries. The assumption is being made in spite of the evidence for major outbreaks of bubonic and pneumonic plague *c.* 549, 664–5, 667–8 and 683–4 (the last called the children's plague).³⁷ The long-term effect of such pandemics is determined not just by the death-rate but by what happens subsequently. Populations can be reduced for a long period if the age-profile of the population becomes less favourable to recovery or if the average age of marriage rises. A population may, however, recover rapidly if the average age of marriage declines. It is possible, therefore, to reconcile the general evidence for increased settlement and economic activity in the period between the fourth and the eighth centuries with the

³⁵ J. J. Tierney, 'The Greek Geographic Tradition and Ptolemy's Evidence for Irish Geography', *PRLA*, 76 c (1976), 257–65, argues that the bulk of Ptolemy's information about Ireland came from Philemon, a writer of the first century AD. On Ptolemy's account of Britain see A. L. Rivet and C. Smith, *The Place-Names of Roman Britain* (London, 1979), pp. 103–47. For an example of Ptolemy's information being the better part of a century old, see P. Salway, *Roman Britain* (Oxford, 1981), p. 98.

³⁶ Similarly his Auteñnoi are the Úaithni: Mac Neill, 'Early Irish Population-Groups', p. 102, § 136; O'Rahilly's attempt, *Early Irish History and Mythology*, pp. 37–8, to equate the Brigantes of Ptolemy with the Uí Bairrche is implausible.

³⁷ W. P. MacArthur, 'The Identification of Some Pestilences Recorded in the Irish Annals', *Irish Historical Studies*, 6 (1948–9), 169–88; cf. J. Maddicott, 'Plague in Seventh-Century England', *Past & Present*, 156 (1997), 7–54.

outbreaks of plague, but this requires the further assumption that the population recovered relatively rapidly after the plague years. Moreover, the implication of such a recovery is that in normal, non-plague periods the population increase will have been more rapid than one would otherwise suspect: it had to sustain the increased extent and density of settlement and also make good the huge death-rates of the plague years.

A number of explanations for the postulated increase in settlement and economic activity will now be advanced: none of them is sufficient on its own, but cumulatively they may offer an intelligible hypothesis to account for the change. It must be said, by way of cautionary preface, that these explanations are speculative. They are suggestions as to where one might look for an explanation rather than a claim to have final solutions to the problem.

It has been argued that before the fourth century AD, dairying was not practised in Ireland.³⁸ Previously, cattle were part of the economy, but for their meat rather than for their milk. Because much more food-value is extracted from a given area of pasture by dairying than by eating meat from domesticated animals, the introduction of dairying could have transformed Irish agriculture. The difficulty with this idea is that it only addresses the recovery in the late Roman period, not the corresponding decline some four centuries earlier.

A second suggestion is based on analogy with a later period, when, in the eleventh century, there was an active slave-trade between Ireland and Britain. Because of the relative wealth of the Roman Empire and its known demand for slaves, the price for slaves was higher within the Empire than it was in Ireland.³⁹ The apparent political instability of Ireland in the period may add substance to this suggestion. A major source of slaves was warfare (in addition to slavery as a punishment and slavery inherited from servile parents); Ireland was undoubtedly politically fragmented. It is plausible, therefore, to picture Ireland as subject to more warfare than the Empire and as producing more slaves. We may thus envisage both higher

³⁸ F. McCormick, 'Cows, Ringforts and the Origins of Early Christian Ireland', *Emania*, 13 (1995), 33–37; cf. idem, 'Dairying and Beef Production in Early Christian Ireland', in Reeves-Smyth and Hamond (eds.), *Landscape Archaeology in Ireland*, pp. 253–68.

³⁹ Cf. Symmachus, *Ep.* ii.78 (ed. O. Seeck, MGH AA vi. 1 [Berlin, 1883], pp. 65–6), where Symmachus asks Flavian to buy some stable-boys, 'since on the frontier slaves are easy to come by and the price is usually tolerable', quoted and discussed by A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1964), pp. 851–5; E. A. Thompson, 'Slavery in Early Germany', in M. Finley (ed.), *Slavery in Classical Antiquity: Views and Controversies* (Cambridge, 1960), pp. 194–5, argues that slaves were scarce in non-Roman Germany partly because they were exported to the Empire; R. MacMullen, 'Late Roman Slavery', *Historia*, 36 (1987), 359–82, and R. Samson, 'Rural Slavery, Inscriptions, Archaeology and Marx: A Response to Ramsay MacMullen', *Historia*, 38 (1989), 99–110; idem, 'Slavery: The Roman Legacy', in J. Drinkwater and H. Elton (eds.), *Fifth-Century Gaul: A Crisis of Identity?* (Cambridge, 1992), 218–27, offer very different assessments of the importance of slavery in the later Roman Empire.

production of slaves in Ireland and higher demand within the Empire; the result would naturally be a net export of slaves from Ireland. If this was on a large scale, as it well might have been in order to pay for luxury imports, there could have been a net reduction in the labour resources of the island. Moreover, this reduction would have been concentrated in that section of the population liable to perform the heaviest labour in agriculture. This explanation therefore addresses in particular the problem posed by the pollen data, that of declining cultivation. It gains some limited support from the evidence suggesting that, in the fourth and fifth centuries, when Irish agriculture was recovering, Irish raiders were interested in taking large numbers of slaves from Britain to Ireland.⁴⁰

There are three difficulties with this idea. First, for it to make much difference the trade in slaves would have had to create a scarcity of slaves in Ireland; and yet the premise of the explanation was a relative scarcity in the Empire coupled with a relative plenty in Ireland. A trade in slaves might have reduced any disparities of price on either side of the Irish Sea. Secondly, if the slave-trade were on a large scale, it should have produced a corresponding inflow of Roman goods into Ireland. While there certainly were imports of Roman goods into Ireland, it is far from clear that they were on the scale required by this theory.⁴¹ Thirdly, the explanation does not help to explain the demise of Emain Macha and similar sites in the first century BC.

Another attempt at explanation takes its starting-point from trade, but not specifically from the trade in slaves. Trade may be in perishable or non-perishable goods. Sometimes, to confuse things a little, perishable goods may come in non-perishable containers, such as wine in amphorae. If the terms of trade encouraged the export of non-perishable items, for example in precious metals, but the import of perishable items, the effect would be to slant the archaeological evidence in a deceptive manner. There would be an apparent decline in the production of non-perishable goods, whereas in reality there might have been no overall decline or even an increase. So far as it goes, this theory is quite plausible: Tacitus' remarks in the *Agricola* show that Roman merchants frequented Irish ports in the first century AD;⁴² it has always been supposed that Ptolemy's information about Ireland came ultimately from merchants. The problem is, however, that this explanation applies solely to one category of evidence, the apparent scarcity of artefacts from the

⁴⁰ Patrick was taken into slavery 'cum tot milia hominum', *Confessio*, c. 1.

⁴¹ See below, pp. 156–7. ⁴² *Agricola*, c. 24.

Irish Late Iron Age. It does not help with the pollen data suggesting a decline in the extent of cultivation. Moreover it conflicts with the previous explanation: slaves are an important example of an archaeologically invisible item of trade and were there argued to be exported in the early Roman period.

A different approach is to look at the economic fortunes of those countries with which Ireland is likely to have traded, mainly Britain but also Gaul and Spain. Here there is some hard evidence on which to base a theory. Broadly, the suggestion is that in the early Empire the net flow of resources was from the periphery to the core, while in the late Empire the flow was reversed.⁴³ In the late Empire the state taxed its rural population heavily in order to pay for an enlarged army.⁴⁴ Because of barbarian threats the army was based in the frontier provinces. The tax came, therefore, from the whole empire but was spent disproportionately in such provinces as Upper and Lower Germany and even Britain. The same went for the location of the emperor and his immediate following: in the early Empire he was mainly to be found in Italy, especially Rome; in the late Empire he was far more likely to be found at Sirmium on the Danube, Trier on the Moselle, or, if in Italy, at Milan close to the Alpine passes.

In the third, and the first half of the fourth century, Britain was in a much better economic condition than Gaul. It was not troubled by the invasions of the third century and appears to have enjoyed particular prosperity in the first half of the fourth century.⁴⁵ The district around Bath, which by *c.* 350 had the densest concentration of Roman villas in the south-west, had none until about 270.⁴⁶ This may partly be because the land previously belonged to imperial estates, but the prosperity of an area adjacent to the Irish Sea and Bristol Channel is significant.

The consequences for Ireland of the prosperity of late Roman Britain are not easy to assess. In the fifth century, at least, and probably the fourth, the eastern seaboard of Ireland as far north as Co. Louth was part of the province of Leinster. Only in around 500, according to plausible but later evidence, were the midlands, Brega and Mide, taken from

⁴³ I owe this idea to discussion at the seminar 'After Rome' then (*c.* 1990) being run by John Matthews and Bryan Ward-Perkins.

⁴⁴ Jones, *Later Roman Empire*, pp. 1035, 1043–6; but his views on the increased size of the army are opposed by J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *Barbarians and Bishops: Army, Church, and State in the Age of Arcadius and Chrysostom* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 40–2.

⁴⁵ Salway, *Roman Britain*, pp. 276–82, 328–9.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 280; K. Branigan, *The Roman Villa in South-West England* (Bradford-on-Avon, 1977), pp. 37–47 (and on the effects of the raids, pp. 93–108).

Leinster.⁴⁷ This larger Leinster is also the area of Ireland in which there is most evidence for Roman imports. The distribution of Roman finds in Ireland shows one definite concentration, from the Wicklow Mountains northwards to the Boyne valley, mainly in Brega, an area taken from Leinster by the ancestors of the Uí Néill *c.* 500, but also in the northern districts of the later, smaller Leinster.⁴⁸ Once Leinster had lost the midland plain of Brega, it began to look away from the sea; client kingdoms lay on the east side of the Wicklow Mountains, whereas the main centres of power were to the west, especially in Co. Kildare.

Rather than imagining Roman merchants being able to traverse the entire island, it is more plausible to envisage them having access to the island through trading sites defined by political agreement, what are sometimes called 'gateway communities' and were known in the seventh and eighth centuries as *emporia*.⁴⁹ One site that has been suggested as having such a role is Dalkey Island, at the southern end of Dublin Bay.⁵⁰ Another may have been found at Drumanagh, near Loughshinny, on the coast north of Rush, Co. Dublin, but the evidence has not yet been published.⁵¹ By the seventh and eighth centuries, if not earlier, there may have been another at Colp near the mouth of the Boyne, especially if this is the Inber Colptha of the written sources.⁵² *Emporia* within this central span of the east coast would account for the concentration of Roman finds in what was later known as Brega and in the adjacent area to the south of the Liffey.

Under the early Empire it looks as though most traders were based in Britain. It would therefore have been the Roman authorities in Britain who would have been likely to have negotiated protection for such traders in Irish *emporia* and to have benefited by any intelligence that came back from such sources. In the late Empire, however, the Irish Sea was tending to pass under the control of the Irish. At this period the government of Roman Britain was investing heavily in coastal defences, not just against Saxon raiders in the east and in the English Channel but also against the Irish on the west coast. Holyhead and Cardiff were two such coastal forts. A reliance on coastal fortification suggests that raiding could not be prevented by negotiation with kings of Leinster or Ulster;

⁴⁷ See below, pp. 447–58. ⁴⁸ Distribution map in Raftery, *Pagan Celtic Ireland*, p. 214.

⁴⁹ Bede, *HE* ii.3, on the *emporium* at London.

⁵⁰ Mytum, *The Origins of Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 262–3 (grid ref.: o 27 26).

⁵¹ Raftery, *Pagan Celtic Ireland*, pp. 207–8; grid ref.: o 27 56.

⁵² Muirchú, *Vita S. Patricii* i.14; Meyer, 'The Laud Genealogies and Tribal Histories', ed. K. Meyer, *ŽCP*, 8 (1912), 291–338, 312.13.

it further suggests that by the fourth century the Empire lacked the naval power in the Irish Sea to enforce its will upon Irish rulers.

The emergence of Irish sea-power is also attested by literary sources, notably by Ammianus. He tells us that in 360 (some years before the major attack in 369) a treaty was broken, and, as a result, areas adjacent to the frontier of Britain were subject to devastation by Scotti and Picti and the provinces of Britain were themselves threatened.⁵³ Ammianus, whose account has high authority, since he was a contemporary and also someone who had served as an officer in the army, clearly implies that there had previously been some kind of peace treaty. The Roman authorities were not ignorant of affairs in Ireland but were in diplomatic contact with the Scotti.

One indication of changes in power in the Irish Sea is provided by control of the Isle of Man (the same was true in the Viking period). By the late Empire the Isle of Man was thought to be Irish. After a British revival, however, Bede treats Man as British by *c.* 630.⁵⁴ Although he uses Orosius' form of the name, he changes the ethnic attribution. The ability to mount major sea-borne attacks across the Irish Sea suggests that the Irish had previously, during the peace broken in 360, invested heavily in ships. Since this was during peace, the likelihood is that the investment was mainly for purposes of trade, which would not preclude some piracy on the side. Such investment in ships for trade would suggest, in turn, that among the terms of the peace broken in 360 may have been access for Irish traders to British ports.⁵⁵ The Irish shipping that existed by 360 may, therefore, have played a part in ensuring that the Irish had access to the greater prosperity of Britain in the fourth century.

There may, therefore, have been a double contrast between the early and late Empire in relations between Ireland and Britain. Under the early Empire, Britain was both less wealthy and less Romanised than it was to be under the late Empire; it may even have been less wealthy than it was in the immediate pre-Roman period, because of the effects of conquest and imperial taxation. Furthermore, under the late Empire trade was more in Irish hands than it probably had been in the first century.

⁵³ Ammianus, *Res Gestae*, ed. W. Seyfarth, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1978), xx.1.1.

⁵⁴ Orosius, *Libri Historiarum adversum Paganos*, ed. C. Zangemeister, CSEL 5 (Vienna, 1882), ii.2.82; Bede, *HE* ii.9.

⁵⁵ Salway, *Roman Britain*, p. 618, on customs-dues. This period offers a plausible context for Carney's early Latin loans in the Leinster poems referring to ships: *bárc* < Latin *barca*, *long* < *navis longa*: J. Carney, 'Three Old Irish Accentual Poems', *Ériu*, 22 (1971), 69–70.

Ireland is thus likely to have benefited more from trade with late Roman Britain than it had at an earlier period. Relations with Roman Britain may, therefore, have played some part in the revival of Irish agriculture in the fourth century AD. The earlier decline remains a difficulty: any downturn in agricultural and artefactual activity in the first century BC is too early to be associated with the extension of Roman power over northern Gaul and Britain.

(II) IRISH SETTLEMENTS IN BRITAIN

In Ammianus' references to the attacks of the 360s the Scotti are placed alongside the Picti and, in one more puzzling reference, pertaining to 364, the Atacotti.⁵⁶ The Picts were a confederation of peoples akin to those of the Franks and the Alamans on the Rhine frontier. In each case there is evidence for continuing identity on the part of constituent peoples within the federation, such as the Verturiones among the Picts or the Bructeri among the Franks. Similarly, these constituent peoples continued to be led by their own kings: the Verturiones were to become the early medieval kingdom of Fortriu, attested in the Irish annals.⁵⁷ The principal source of unity at the level of the confederation as a whole appears to have been provided by the need to deal with Roman authorities. Thus the Frankish confederation was opposite the province of Germania Inferior, the Alaman confederation opposite the province of Germania Superior, while the Picts formed in the third century beyond the Antonine Wall. They did not include the British peoples north of Hadrian's Wall and thus inhabiting what is now Northumberland and southern Scotland; the latter had earlier been within the Roman province when it was bounded by the Antonine Wall. The Pictish confederation was a product of a frontier zone rather than of Hadrian's Wall itself.⁵⁸

The pattern found on the Rhine and in northern Britain raises the question whether there was a similar development among the Irish. It

⁵⁶ Ammianus, *Res Gestae*, xxvi.4.5. ⁵⁷ AU 768.7.

⁵⁸ Cf. Cassius Dio, *Epitome*, ed. U. P. Boissevain, *Cassi Dionis Cocceiani Historiarum Romanarum quae supersunt* (repr. Berlin, 1959), iii, 77, 12, 1-2, pp. 366-7 on the Caledonians and the Maeatae: 'the names of the others have been merged as it were into these . . .' D. J. Breeze, *The Northern Frontier of Roman Britain* (London, 1982), pp. 153-9; F. T. Wainwright, 'The Picts and the Problem', in F. T. Wainwright (ed.), *The Problem of the Picts* (London, 1955), p. 23; A. P. Smyth, *Warlords and Holy Men: Scotland AD 80-1000* (London, 1984), pp. 44-5, regards the term 'Picti' as 'a loose geographical term for raiders living north of the Antonine Wall', but without reference to the continental parallels; there is no reason for attaching much importance to the etymology of the word Pict, since the same people or alliance of peoples were known to the Irish and Britons under another name (Irish *Cruithin*, Welsh *Prydyn*).

may further be asked whether the term 'Scotti' originated as the Roman word for those who participated in this confederation: unlike Hiberni and Hibernia, Scotti and Scottia are not attested before the fourth century.⁵⁹ In that case the Atacotti might have been a similar confederation including other Irish peoples.⁶⁰ Attempts to make them the people of the Hebrides are open to objection. It was later the Pictish belief that the southern Hebrides had been Pictish before Irish settlement of the area, just as the Hebrides from Ardnamurchan northwards seem to have remained Pictish in the late sixth century.⁶¹

Early Irish evidence suggests that the kings of Leinster were participants in external expansion.⁶² This is confirmed by the Middle Welsh place-names Lleyn (the Llŷn peninsula) and Dinllaen, which probably contain respectively the nominative plural, Laigin, and genitive plural, Laigen, of one of the names the Leinstermen gave themselves.⁶³ Moreover, if the Leinstermen did control the whole eastern seaboard as far north as Co. Louth until *c.* 500, it is hardly likely that a series of major Irish attacks on Britain were mounted without their participation. They did not, however, control the whole of the eastern coast of Ireland. North of their territory, the eastern coastal area very probably formed part of the province of the Ulaid, one of the few historically attested peoples to be mentioned already by Ptolemy. If, then, we may hazard a guess and interpret Ammianus' references to Scotti and Atacotti as referring to two Irish confederations, the probability is quite strong that they refer respectively to confederations consisting of, or led by, the Leinstermen and the Ulstermen, Laigin and Ulaid.⁶⁴

The term 'Scotti', as we have seen, is not attested in Latin writers before the late Empire.⁶⁵ Its chronology is thus similar to that of Picti, Franci and Alamanni, a further indication that it originated as an alliance

⁵⁹ A. Holder, *Alt-celtische Sprachschatz* (Leipzig, 1891–1913), pp. 1406–12.

⁶⁰ For the name and its attestation see Rivet and Smith, *The Place-Names of Roman Britain*, p. 259.

⁶¹ Pictish claims to have ruled even over parts of Argyll are reflected by Bede, *HE* iii.3–4; cf. Adomnán, *VSC* i.33.

⁶² Carney, 'Three Old Irish Accentual Poems', 69–70, lists a set of Latin loans, found in the early Leinster poetry, falling within the military and seafaring semantic areas, such as *legión* < Lat. *legion-*, *trebunn* < Lat. *tribunus*.

⁶³ J. Lloyd-Jones, *Enwau Lleodedd Sir Gaernarfon* (Cardiff, 1928), pp. 4–5.

⁶⁴ The evidence for Éoganacht and Airgíalla presence in Scotland may be an outcome of their participation in the Atacotti: 'Éoganacht Maige Gergind i nAlbae' (*sic leg.* with Lec. and BB), *CGH* i.196.

⁶⁵ Strabo, *Geography*, ed. and tr. F. Lasserre, *Strabon: Géographie*, Budé, ii (Paris, 1966), iv, 5, 4, p. 168; Diodorus Siculus, ed. F. Vogel, *Diodori Bibliotheca Historica* (repr. Stuttgart, 1964), v, 32, ii, p. 45; Pomponius Mela, *De Chorographia*, ed. P. Parroni, *Pomponii Melae de Chorographia Libri Tres* (Rome, 1984), iii, 6, p. 164; C. Iulius Solinus, *Collectanea Rerum Memorabilium*, ed. Th. Mommsen (Berlin, 1895), 22, 2–3, p. 100.

of peoples involved with Roman power. By the time of Patrick, 'Scotti' could be used alongside 'Hiberionaci' for the Irish as a whole, as it would be by Adomnán and other later writers.⁶⁶ 'Scotti' does not seem to correspond to any native name for the Irish; the only native term, Féni, was also used for another major early Irish confederation of peoples, but one based further west and thus unlikely to have been of great importance for the Romans.⁶⁷

Ammianus' account of the 'barbarian conspiracy' of 367 suggests that the Scotti were able to concert operations together with the Picts and the Saxons.⁶⁸ This major attack came after several years of raiding, Julian's rebellion against Constantius and fatal war against Persia. A new settlement of the imperial government was necessary once Julian's death in 363 had removed the last emperor of the Constantinian house. All this precluded any prompt attention to British affairs. Even in 367 Valentinian was detained in Gaul by the threat of an Alaman attack. His eventual deputy, after two others had failed, was Theodosius, father of the future emperor. He found raiders throughout the country, the leading Roman generals dead, the army in disarray.

The barbarian conspiracy is the first date at which one might be tempted to place the Irish settlements in western Britain. They were evidently well established in the sixth century; but the evidence of Patrick and of Gildas shows that Irish attacks on Britain continued well into the fifth century, and there is no certain way to establish whether the most important settlement on Roman territory, in what is now south-west Wales, dated from the fourth or the fifth century.⁶⁹ The problem is

⁶⁶ Adomnán, *VSC* 1st Pref., uses *Scotica lingua* for Irish; i.38, *Scotia* for Ireland; i.40, *Scotienses* for the Irish; in ii.46, the *Scoti Britanniae* are the Irish of western Scotland. On the other hand, Columbanus uses *Iberi* for the Irish, *Eph.* ii. 9, v. 3 (ed. Walker, *Sancti Columbani Opera*, pp. 22, 38).

⁶⁷ The Féni are still distinguished from the Gailni (= Laigin) and the Ulaid in the eighth-century saga of Fergus mac Léti, ed. D. A. Binchy, *Ériu*, 16 (1952), 37 (tr. p. 39). They seem to have included the Uí Néill, Connachta, Éoganachta and Airgialla. The derivation of Gwynedd from Féni (so Lloyd-Jones, *Enwau Lleoedd Sir Gaernarfon*, p. 5) is insecure: E. P. Hamp, 'Fian!+', *Studia Celtica Japonica*, 8 (1996), sees them as parallel formations. In the laws of the seventh and eighth centuries, they are sometimes all the Irish, but are sometimes distinguished from the Ulaid: *Bechbretha*, ed. Charles-Edwards and Kelly, § 33, is an example of the distinction (for other exx. see the note, pp. 133–4). *Goidil* is a borrowing from Welsh *Gwyddyl*: according to O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology*, pp. 205–6, it was a loan from 'Ivernic', the Brittonic language which, he claims, was spoken in Ireland up to 'the seventh century if not later', but this theory has not been generally accepted. On *Goidil* and *Gwyddyl* see P. Mac Cana, 'Y Trefedigaethau Gwyddelig ym Mhrydain', in G. Bowen (ed.), *Y Gwareiddiad Celtaidd* (Llandysul, 1987), pp. 168–9.

⁶⁸ R. C. Blockley, 'The Date of the "Barbarian Conspiracy"', *Britannia*, 11 (1980), 223–5.

⁶⁹ Charles Thomas, *And Shall These Mute Stones Speak? Post-Roman Inscriptions in Western Britain* (Cardiff, 1994), p. 56, comes down in favour of a settlement in the last decade or two of the fourth century, after the military strength of the diocese was weakened by Magnus Maximus' withdrawal of troops in 483.

complicated by the distribution of Irish settlements. These occurred in Argyll, in Man, in Gwynedd in north-west Wales, Dyfed in south-west Wales, Brycheiniog in central southern Wales, in the west of Glamorgan and in south-west Britain. They were not confined to the Roman provinces of Britain. While, therefore, the weaknesses and the wealth of late Roman Britain are part of the explanation of Irish expansion in the period, they cannot be the whole story. There must have been internal reasons for the Irish to colonise territory in Britain, reasons which would explain the settlement in Argyll as well as those within Roman Britain. A necessary condition will have been the capacity to build considerable fleets and to retain control of the Irish Sea and the southern Hebridean waters; but a need for land must also be part of the explanation. This land-hunger is most unlikely to have been caused by a shortage of suitable agricultural land within Ireland, since settlement was only beginning to recover from the down-turn of the Late Iron Age; it is more likely to have been a need on the part of kings and nobles for land to sustain their rank. The land-hunger was political rather than agricultural.

The most elaborate recent explanation of the contrast between the Iron Age and the Early Christian period in Ireland places great emphasis on the Irish settlements in Roman and post-Roman Britain.⁷⁰ It is a modification of the usual view that conversion to Christianity was the crucial cause of change. Instead, the conversion of the Irish was a major, but not the sole, element in a broader influence of Britain upon Ireland; this influence stemmed as much from the Irish settlements within Britain, and the consequent close ties between Britain and Ireland, as from conversion taken by itself. Kinship ties between the Irish in Britain and the Irish in Ireland are argued to be important both for their general role in the transmission of ideas and techniques and for the assistance they are presumed to have given to the process of conversion itself.

The proposed sequence of causation may be summarised as follows: the Irish settlements within Roman Britain initiated much closer ties between the two islands; the closer ties encouraged conversion; the new Christian faith inculcated a higher valuation of the individual; as a consequence of this fundamental change of attitude, changes in kinship and inheritance now allowed individuals to own land; greater individualism in agriculture encouraged both higher productivity and wider extension of cultivation.

The principal link between the conversion period and the eighth century, when the material culture of Early Christian Ireland was at its

⁷⁰ Mytum, *The Origins of Early Christian Ireland*, esp. chaps. 2 and 8.

height, was, on this view, 'the rise of the individual'. The individual has no doubt risen at many periods and in many countries. In this instance the case rests on the claim that a strict control exercised by the kindred over the individual was characteristic of the under-achieving Ireland of the Iron Age; by contrast, the impact of Christianity was principally to enhance the status of the individual person – a person whose salvation was now the supreme end of human endeavour. There are many difficulties in this argument, not the least of which is the difficulty of seeing how the supposed effects of Christianity on changes in kinship organisation – attested in the written evidence only from about AD 700 – could be responsible for an expansion in the extent of cultivation which, on the pollen evidence, got under way no later than the fourth century. The extension and intensification of agricultural production was not, according to this argument, ultimately due to a rise in population. The latter was a result, not the cause, of social change.⁷¹ The 'rise of the individual' thus has to act as the pre-eminent cause of change. The principal difficulty, however, is that there is no good evidence for the claim that individuals did not own land before the kinship changes attested about AD 700.⁷²

The Irish settlements in western Britain, both within and without the late Roman diocese of Britain, are probably best understood from two directions: first, from the weakness and the wealth of late Roman Britain, which enticed raiders from among the Irish as well as the Picts and the Saxons;⁷³ and, secondly, from the pollen evidence indicating a revival of agriculture in Ireland from the fourth century. As we have seen already, the first cannot be the full explanation because the Irish also settled in what is now Argyll far outside the Roman diocese of Britain. The profits of raiding may also, however, have encouraged further extension of settlement within Ireland, since they provided supplies of slaves to do heavy labour. In addition, they may also have been part and parcel of greater competition among the Irish aristocracy. The profits of raiding may have been not just the motive of the raider but also the means by which competition for high status was stimulated at home. The ringfort may, in origin, have been a form of aristocratic display, as in its grander, multivallate forms it remained; but the better-off commoner

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁷² It is essential, in the early Irish context, to distinguish two property rights: (1) the right to exclusive use of land; (2) the right to alienate land; individuals regularly had (1) but not (2) unless they had themselves acquired it, and even then the right was not unfettered: see *EIWK*, pp. 67–70.

⁷³ Illustrated by the Coleraine (Ballinrees) hoard: J. P. C. Kent and K. S. Painter (eds.), *The Wealth of the Roman World* (London, 1977), pp. 125–7.

aspired to aristocratic rank and may well have imitated his betters in this way as in others. Both interpretations of the ringfort may be right, in different ways: in origin, it may be aristocratic even if, in the end, it became the settlement form for all substantial farmers. Although, in the seventh and eighth centuries, an Irish lord could require his base clients to work at digging his ditch and rampart, in the fourth and fifth centuries he may have done the work with British slaves.

(III) LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY IN WESTERN BRITAIN

The early medieval kingdom of Dyfed was heir to the Romano-British *civitas* of the Demetae. Reflecting this inheritance, the early inscriptions of the area are predominantly in Latin. Moreover, the character of the Latin used in the inscriptions demonstrates that it was then, for some, a spoken language, not merely a language of the quill and the chisel. On the other hand, from at least the sixth century until the ninth, Dyfed was ruled by a dynasty for which Irish ancestry was claimed.⁷⁴ In much of the kingdom, in the county of Pembroke and the western part of Carmarthenshire, an Irish presence in the early Middle Ages is confirmed by inscriptions incised in the ogam alphabet and in an early form of the Irish language.⁷⁵ The inscriptions show, therefore, that Dyfed was far from being just a British kingdom and their evidence is confirmed by place-names of Irish origin.

Information from the other side of the Irish Sea is not contemporary and is difficult to handle. The story of the 'Expulsion (or Migration) of the Déissi' claims that one branch of the Déissi of the modern Co. Waterford founded the royal dynasty of Dyfed; Cormac's Glossary places the fortress of the sons of Liathán – the Uí Liatháin of east Co. Cork – in Cornwall, not in Dyfed as in the *Historia Brittonum*, c. 14, and says nothing of the Déissi.⁷⁶ The former existence of Irish settlements in

⁷⁴ *Tairied na nDéisse*, ed. and tr. K. Meyer, 'The Expulsion of the Déissi', *Y Cymmrodor*, 14 (1901), pp. 112–13, § 11; T. Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Déissi and Dyfed', *Éigse*, 20 (1984), 1–33.

⁷⁵ For ogam see below, pp. 164–8. M. Richards, 'Irish Settlements in South-West Wales: A Topographical Approach', *JRSAL*, 90 (1960), 133–62, discusses the place-name as well as the epigraphical evidence. For an account embracing a wider area, see Charles Thomas, *And Shall These Mute Stones Speak?*, pp. 41–66, which updates his 'The Irish Settlements in Post-Roman Western Britain: A Survey of the Evidence', *Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall*, N.S., 6 (1969–72), 251–74.

⁷⁶ *Historia Brittonum*, c. 14 (ed. E. Faral, *La Légende arthurienne: études et documents*, Paris, 1929, iii.13); Meyer, 'The Expulsion of the Déissi', § 11; *Sanas Cormaic: An Old Irish Glossary*, ed. K. Meyer, Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts, ed. O. J. Bergin *et al.*, 4 (Halle, 1912), no. 883; M. Dillon, 'The Irish Settlements in Wales', *Celtica*, 12 (1977), 1–11; Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Déissi and Dyfed', 1–3, 18–28 (on pp. 18–19 the versions of Rawlinson B 502 and Laud Misc. 612 are both given); on p. 26 he suggests that the composite material on the Déissi suggests a further migration to Dyfed from Leinster.

western Britain was, therefore, still common knowledge in the ninth and tenth centuries, but the details were far from being agreed. The period of Irish power on both sides of the Irish Sea was seen as something in the past by Cormac, as it was by the Welsh sources, but this is not surprising since the Glossary, in so far as it is the work of Cormac mac Cuilennáin (ob. 908), is a text of the Viking period.⁷⁷ The whole body of evidence, British and Irish, gives the impression of an old but muddled tradition, not propaganda newly devised on behalf of an intrusive dynasty.⁷⁸

With this in mind we may turn back to the sixth century, to the time of Voteporix, possibly the Vortiporius, 'tyrant of the Demetae', *Demetarum tyrannus*, denounced by Gildas.⁷⁹ He is commemorated in a bilingual (Latin/Irish) inscription formerly at the entrance to Castellldwyran churchyard in the west of Carmarthenshire and thus in the heartland of early medieval Dyfed.⁸⁰ The Latin, in square capitals, runs as follows: MEMORIA/VOTEPORIGIS/PROTICTORIS, 'The Memorial of Voteporix "Protector"'.⁸¹ The other, containing only the name, is in the ogam alphabet and in an early form of Irish, VOTECORIGAS.⁸² In what is, therefore, the commemorative stone of a person of

⁷⁷ The most likely interpretation is that the shorter version of Cormac, as found in *Lebor Brecc* and fragmentarily in Bodleian MS Laud Misc. 610, is of Munster origin about the time of Cormac: cf. P. Russell, 'The Sounds of a Silence: The Growth of Cormac's Glossary', *CMCS*, 15 (summer 1988), 1–30, especially 10–11; idem, 'Duil Dromma Cetta and Cormac's Glossary', *Etudes Celtiques*, 32 (1996), 115–42, esp. 129–33.

⁷⁸ N. K. Chadwick, 'Early Culture and Learning in North Wales', in N. K. Chadwick (ed.), *Studies in the Early British Church* (Cambridge, 1958), 34–5, maintains that the Cunedda story (according to which a British leader from the district of Manaw, near Stirling, came south with his sons and expelled the Irish from most of Wales) is antiquarian speculation based on the genealogies and stimulated by a new sense of nationalism associated, in Wales, with the reign of Rhodri Mawr. An argument against this that the versions of the story in the *Historia Brittonum* are earlier than the version in the Harleian Genealogies: the genealogical version is the later; and the versions in the *Historia Brittonum* both antedate Rhodri Mawr.

⁷⁹ Cf. D. Dumville, 'Gildas and Maelgwn', in *Gildas: New Approaches*, ed. M. Lapidge and D. Dumville (Woodbridge, 1984), 57. One argument for identifying the two is the mangled echo in the tenth-century Harleian pedigree, in which, seven generations above *Guortepir*, we have *Maxim guleic protec protector*. The best account of the date of Gildas is by Clare Stancliffe, 'The Thirteen Sermons Attributed to Columbanus and the Question of their Authorship', in M. Lapidge (ed.), *Columbanus: Studies on the Latin Writings*, *Studies in Celtic History*, 17 (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 177–81, who favours a date in the 530s or 540s.

⁸⁰ *ECMW* no. 138, now in the Carmarthen Museum. Castellldwyran churchyard is SN 144 182 (the presence there of the stone is first attested in 1895; for this information I am indebted to Nancy Edwards).

⁸¹ E. Hamp, 'Voteporigis Protictoris', *Studia Celtica*, 30 (1996), 293, analyses *Votepo-* as 'protecting' and therefore interprets *Protictoris* as 'a sort of onomastic explanatory gloss'. If glossing were a habit of lapidaries, this might be attractive.

⁸² As is normal with ogam inscriptions, the name is in the genitive; some equivalent to 'The Memorial' is probably presupposed. The Irish would then mean '(The Memorial) of Votecorix'.

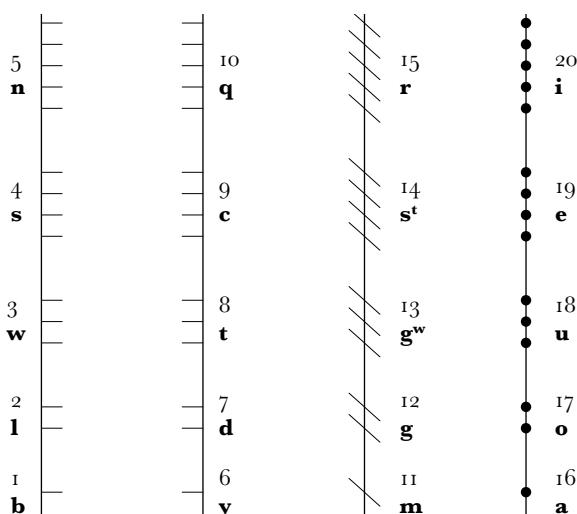


Fig. 4.1. The ogam alphabet

very high rank, even if he is not the tyrant of the Demetae denounced by Gildas, Irish is admissible alongside Latin; Welsh does not appear at all.

The ogam alphabet is attested only on stone in the early Christian period.⁸³ In this form it typically uses the line formed by the angle at the corner of a stone. Some letters are made by incised lines across this central line, some by lines projecting in one direction or the other from the central line, while the vowel symbols are made by notches on the central line (see fig. 4.1).⁸⁴

This alphabet was devised to fit the Irish language as it was before the rapid and far-reaching changes that occurred in the fifth and sixth centuries. It was not a simple application of, or a cipher for, the Latin alphabet.⁸⁵ On the other hand, it was very probably invented by someone who was aware of the way in which Latin grammarians analysed the sounds of their own language. Like the Latin alphabet, it makes no distinction

⁸³ The standard (and very helpful) work is McManus, *A Guide to Ogam*. For later examples on materials other than stone (no earlier than the ninth century), see *ibid.*, p. 132, and for references in saga, pp. 153–63.

⁸⁴ Some of the values, especially those of nos. 13 and 14, are uncertain. The interpretation given is that of McManus, *A Guide to Ogam*; cf. also P. Sims-Williams, 'Some Problems in Deciphering the Early Ogam Alphabet', *Transactions of the Philological Society*, 91 (1993), 133–80.

⁸⁵ Although the vowel symbols may have begun as just such a cipher: Sims-Williams, 'Some Problems in Deciphering the Early Irish Ogam Alphabet', 135.

between long and short vowels;⁸⁶ but, with that exception, it appears to have been a remarkably faithful representation of the phonology of Irish in the fourth century. It entailed, therefore, an exceptional feat of linguistic analysis: to learn from a Latin model, and yet to remain almost entirely independent of it, and to achieve so accurate a result. It is not surprising that as late as the eighth century, the ogam alphabet was closely linked in the minds of Irish scholars with their native language and with its status vis-à-vis Latin.⁸⁷ It was a demonstration of the claim that their language matched that of Rome.

Although a remarkable linguistic achievement, the ogam alphabet was not a general competitor for its Latin counterpart, as can be seen from the ogam version of '(the memorial) of Voteporix', namely Votecorigas (reading from the bottom to the top) (see fig. 4.2).⁸⁸

The way it was used in the fifth and sixth centuries can be understood a little better by considering the different letter-forms used for Latin. On the evidence of later manuscripts, the British Church used a version of the script known as half-uncial for important books.⁸⁹ Late Roman cursive, 'rapid script', attested on tablets at Bath, was also available for more everyday purposes.⁹⁰ Out of the mutual influence of these two scripts emerged, at an unknown date but before the end of the sixth century, Insular minuscule. In Ireland, this, rather than late Roman cursive, became the script for normal purposes; it is attested, for example, by the wax tablets from Springmount Bog.⁹¹ Insular minuscule probably developed out of the need to multiply copies of important books reasonably cheaply. This need would have been especially acute

⁸⁶ Ibid., 134.

⁸⁷ *Auraicept na nÉces*, ed. A. Ahlqvist, *The Early Irish Linguist: An Edition of the Canonical Part of the Auraicept na nÉces* (Helsinki, 1983), §§ 1–2.

⁸⁸ *ECMW*, no. 138. Note that, by a slip, his drawing does not show the penultimate A (which is in *CHC*, no. 358). Note also that /k/ and /kʷ/, /g/ and /gʷ/ have fallen together. If sign no. 13 was indeed originally for /gʷ/, it is nonetheless used here, instead of no. 12, for original /g/ before a non-rounded back vowel; for a discussion of some of the problems see K. R. McCone, *Towards a Relative Chronology of Ancient and Medieval Celtic Sound Change*, Maynooth Studies in Celtic Linguistics 1 (Maynooth, 1996), pp. 23–4, who suggests that /gʷ/ was unrounded to /g/ earlier before a rounded vowel.

⁸⁹ T. J. Brown, 'The Oldest Irish Manuscripts and their Late Antique Background', in Ní Chatháin and Richter (eds.), *Ireland und Europa*, pp. 311–12, 321, and repr. in his *A Palaeographer's View*, pp. 221–2, 233–4; but it should be noted that Brown operated with one highly questionable assumption, namely that fourth-century Britain was relatively poor and therefore backward compared with contemporary Gaul.

⁹⁰ R. S. O. Tomlin, *Tabellae Sulis: Roman Inscribed Tablets of Tin and Lead from the Sacred Spring at Bath* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 84–94, reprinted, but with the same pagination, from B. Cunliffe (ed.), *The Temple of Sulis Minerva at Bath*, vol. 2, *The Finds from the Sacred Springs* (Oxford, 1988).

⁹¹ E. A. Lowe, *Codices Latini Antiquiores*, 11 vols. and Supplement (Oxford, 1934–71), Suppl. no. 1684.

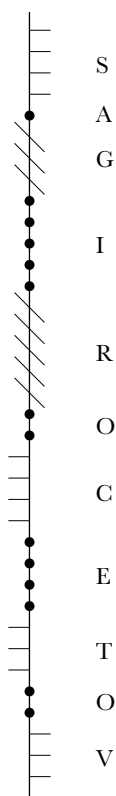


Fig. 4.2. 'The memorial' of Voteporix' (ogam inscription)

during the formative period of the Irish Church, under British influence, during the fifth and early sixth centuries. Insular minuscule thus became the standard book-script for both the Britons and the Irish, leaving half-uncial for the grander books.

For inscriptions, however, Roman capitals were still used up to the early seventh century. As a result there were two distinct sets of letter-forms: one, Roman capitals, was used for inscriptions; the other set, comprising half-uncial and its less grand companion, minuscule, was used for books. About that date, however, a collapse occurred in the distinction between inscriptional and book lettering, so that seventh-century inscriptions were tending to use half-uncial, namely the book-script. In the fifth and sixth centuries, bilingual inscriptions in Irish and Latin used ogam for Irish but Roman capitals for Latin. The

character of the ogam alphabet suggests that this was its original function. That is to say, it was intended as an Irish counterpart to the inscriptional letter-forms of the Empire, Roman capitals. It was not, and was never intended to be, a book-script.

The use by an Irish ruler of Dyfed (or an Irish aristocrat if he was not the ruler) of the title *protector* is extraordinary.⁹² It was used in the late Empire for one of the two corps of elite bodyguard troops (*domestici* and *protectores*) entitled 'to adore the purple'. In effect, the *protectores* served as staff officers and were likely to receive high military office as the next step in their careers. We have the formula by which, for Ostrogothic Italy, a *primicerius singulariorum* (head of the messenger service) was advanced to the company of the *domestici et protectores*, in that he was of a rank 'to adore the sacred purple', that is, in theory at least, to have the right of access to the emperor.⁹³ This is an example of the practice whereby deserving veterans or officials received the honour of adoring the sacred purple on retirement. As the Ostrogothic example shows, the idea could survive in a barbarian kingdom. If Voteporix was Gildas' tyrant of the Demetae and *protector* meant what it did to the Ostrogoths and the Romans, it would be surprising to find him using the title, since that would suggest a recognition in the sixth century of imperial authority of some kind, such as the purple said by Gildas to have been worn by the parents of Ambrosius Aurelianus.⁹⁴ On the other hand, it would also be surprising if there were someone other than Vortiporius, called Voteporix, flaunting the right 'to adore the purple' in the heart of Vortiporius' kingdom. Voteporix might conceivably have been a kinsman of Vortiporius (so explaining the close similarity of the names) of a slightly earlier generation (so helping to explain the adoration of the purple).⁹⁵ But the likelihood is that this Roman title had been given a local meaning in post-Roman Britain.⁹⁶

⁹² On the term *protector* see Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, pp. 53–4, 597, 636–40.

⁹³ Cassiodorus, *Variae*, xi.31, ed. Th. Mommsen, MGH, Auctores Antiquissimi, xii.348.

⁹⁴ Gildas, *De Excidio Britanniae*, ed. and tr. M. Winterbottom, *Gildas: The Ruin of Britain* (Chichester, 1978), c. 25.3.

⁹⁵ In the early sixth century the use of Roman titles by barbarian rulers is also exemplified by Clovis' reception of the title of consul. It is not wholly impossible that the envoys of Justinian, who are shown by surviving letters in the Austrasian Letter Collection to have visited Francia, might have gone on to Britain. The very suspicion of such a mission in the seventh century was enough to land Theodore of Canterbury's companion, Hadrian, in prison in Francia: Bede, *HE* iv.1. But the suspicion shows that, for the Franks, such a visit was entirely conceivable.

⁹⁶ Nash-Williams, *ECMW*, compares E. Le Blant, *Inscriptions chrétiennes de la Gaule* (Paris, 1856), ii, no. 606 (Toulouse; fragmentary but including *ANNOS XXXV . . . militavi[t] ANNOS XV . . . protector*); note also Le Blant, *Nouveau recueil des inscriptions de la Gaule* (Paris, 1892), no. 38 (Burgundians: *HARILFVS PROTECTOR DOMESTITCVS EILIVS (for FILIVS) HANHAVALDI REGALIS GENTIS BVRGVNDIONVM . . .*).

Whatever interpretation was given to the title in sixth-century Dyfed, it remains true that it was by origin a term of Roman imperial government. Moreover, the whole character of the stone reveals Roman influence. First, no memorial inscriptions are known from Ireland before the appearance of inscriptions in the ogam alphabet in the late Roman period. The very concept of commemorating the dead by inscriptions on stone was borrowed from the Empire, where it was commonplace. Secondly, the interest in having a double commemoration, in two alphabets and in two languages, ogam for Irish and Roman capitals for Latin, demonstrated a concern to relate Votecorix (or Voteporix) both to Roman and to Irish culture. The stone looked two ways, back to Ireland because of the use of ogam and Irish, but also into the Empire because of the use of Roman letter-forms and the Latin language, and, most fundamentally, because it was a memorial inscription on stone.

It is not known for how long Latin remained a spoken language in Britain. The cultural situation of Dyfed and other Irish settlements, and their role as cultural links between Britain and Ireland, would have been very different if Latin were still spoken alongside Welsh and Irish. On both these points the inscriptions offer decisive evidence.⁹⁷ They show quite unambiguously the presence of Irish; with rather more difficulty they can also indicate approximately how long Latin remained a spoken language in Britain. By this I mean how long it was a language used in a wide variety of styles and registers; Latin remained a spoken language in the liturgy, for example, throughout the Middle Ages, but that is only a use restricted to one register and will not count for this discussion.

We may contrast this linguistic situation with that of those who learnt their Latin from grammars, for example the Irishmen Columbanus and Tírechán. The former wrote much better Latin than the latter, but both learnt it in the same way. The kind of mistakes made by Tírechán are of two types: one is familiar to all those who have had to learn a second language after childhood – he makes simple grammatical errors;⁹⁸ the

⁹⁷ On dating see K. H. Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain* (Edinburgh, 1953), pp. 158–62. I do not, however, share his opinion that the Catamanus stone is likely to be later than c. 625: square capitals did not evolve into half-uncials within post-Roman Britain; rather square capitals were replaced by half-uncials as a form of lettering appropriate for inscriptions. There is no need to allow time for a gradual evolution of letter-forms; since the change was a matter of fashion, it may have happened very fast. It certainly extended to the whole of Wales. Jackson's appeal to the date of foundation of Llangadwaladr depends on the text of *Bonedd y Saint* printed in the *Myvyrian Archaeology*. The reference there to Llangadwaladr is editorial: see P. Bartrum's edn, *Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts* (Cardiff, 1966), p. 56.

⁹⁸ For example, Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 6.1 (p. 126), *possimus* for *possumus*, *acciperunt* for *acceperant*.

second is more interesting – he writes a Latin in which Irish constructions or idioms prevail over their Latin counterparts.⁹⁹ Yet Tírechán, even if he made mistakes, was perfectly well aware of the distinction between Latin cases. On the other hand, many of those who were responsible for the texts of the inscriptions were unaware of any case system at all.¹⁰⁰ They had not learnt their Latin from grammars. Latin was, therefore, in the time of Voteporix, a spoken language, alongside Welsh and Irish.

The clearest evidence that Irish was a spoken language in Wales comes from Kenfig in Glamorgan, many miles to the east of the main Irish settlements in Dyfed. A bilingual inscription runs as follows:¹⁰¹

Ogam: P[O]P[IA] // ROL[.]N M[AQ]I LL[E]NA
 Latin: PVMPEIVS/CARANTORIUS

The Latin inscription is in square capitals. There is nothing in the form of the inscription to suggest that Pompeius and Carantorius were different persons. The ogam inscription, however, appears to be in two parts: one, on the left of the Latin inscription, reading upwards; the other, on the right, reading downwards. Only the lefthand ogam text (P[O]P[IA]) corresponds to the Latin. The other may be quite separate and may have been cut at a different time.¹⁰² PVMPEIVS shows, in the first syllable, the confusion of *u* and *o* characteristic of Late Latin. Like the other Latin name it is in the nominative case. The ogam counterpart to PVMPEIUS, when it was complete, was probably POPIAS, but it might have been in the genitive, POPII. This is an Irish form of the same name, English Pompey, which has been assimilated to the phonology of

⁹⁹ For example, 24.1 (p. 140), ‘quae tenuit pallium apud Patricium et Rodanum’ = ‘gabas caille ó Pátraic 7 ó Ródán’.

¹⁰⁰ J. T. Koch, ‘The Loss of Final Syllables and Loss of Declension in Brittonic’, *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 30 (1983), 201–33, argues persuasively that the loss of declension antedated the loss of final endings; on the evidence of the early Welsh inscriptions, see T. M. Charles-Edwards, ‘Language and Society among the Insular Celts, 400–1000’, in M. Green (ed.), *The Celtic World* (London, 1995), pp. 716–17.

¹⁰¹ ECMW no. 198, now in the Margam Museum; the stone is damaged and the reading therefore uncertain; Nash-Williams’s reading underestimates the amount of hypothetical reconstruction required. See also McManus, *A Guide to Ogam*, § 6.20, who confirms P[.]P[.], and The Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales, *An Inventory of the Ancient Monuments in Glamorgan*, i.3, *The Early Christian Period* (Cardiff, 1976), p. 38, no. 849, which reads P[O or A]P[...]. On the form of ogam used for /p/ see P. Sims-Williams, ‘The Additional Letters of the Ogam Alphabet’, *CMCS*, 23 (1992), 39–44, esp. 42.

¹⁰² The norm in the longer ogam inscriptions is for the text to run upwards on the left-hand angle of the stone, round the top and down the right-hand angle (McManus, *Guide to Ogam*, p. 47, § 4.4); the arrangement is thus not conclusive evidence that there were two distinct inscriptions, even though the ogams do not continue round the top.

Primitive Irish: in place of the *-omp-* of Pompeius it has *-ōb-* spelt as *OP*. It does not belong with the earliest loanwords, which substituted the native Irish *k^w* (ogam *Q*) for Latin *p*, but it contains the earliest example of the standard later convention, derived from British, by which an internal /b/ was spelt as *p*.¹⁰³

The implications of this inscription are far-reaching. First, a man for whom it was appropriate to erect a bilingual memorial stone bore the famous Roman name of Pompeius. In ogam inscriptions in Ireland, Roman names were rarely used, although they were significantly more common than they were among laymen in the eighth century.¹⁰⁴ On the other hand, the use of the name Pompey has its counterpart in the royal pedigree of the Irish kings of Dyfed, where the name Aircol (from Latin *Agricola*) is used for a sixth-century king (the father of Gildas' Vortiporius).¹⁰⁵ The likelihood is that aristocrats or rulers of Irish descent were first prepared to use Roman names in the Irish settlements in Britain and that the habit consequently had a limited and temporary currency in Ireland. Yet, secondly, someone commemorated in Irish as well as in Latin presumably himself came from an Irish-speaking background, in spite of the name Pompey. And, finally, that there was a group of Irish speakers in the neighbourhood is shown by the specifically Irish version of the name, influenced, however, by British spelling habits; all of this presupposes not just an Irish pronunciation of a Roman name but its naturalisation within the local community.

In the next major kingdom to the north, Brycheiniog in the centre of south Wales, two bilingual inscriptions are of particular interest.

Trallwng ¹⁰⁶	Ogam: CUNACENNI [A]VI ILVVETO
	Latin: CVNOCENNI FILIVS / CVNOGENI HIC IACIT
Trecastle ¹⁰⁷	Ogam: MAQITRENI SALICIDUNI
	Latin: MACCVTRENI + SALICIDVNI

¹⁰³ I am grateful to Paul Russell for pointing out to me the use of *p* for /b/ (characteristic of British and later manuscript Irish orthography, not of the orthography of ogam inscriptions in Ireland).

¹⁰⁴ Examples are *MARIANI*, *CIIC*, no. 188, *AMADU* (< Amatus), no. 265; cf. McManus, *Guide to Ogam*, p. 113, § 6.20.

¹⁰⁵ Bartrum, *Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts*, p. 10 (Harleian Genealogies, § 2).

¹⁰⁶ *ECMW* no. 70, situated in the church at SN 965 295; Nash-Williams reads *CVNACENNIVI*, following *CIIC*, no. 342, but the first V is merely a slip for U. Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain*, p. 185, suggests *CUNACENNI (A)VI ILVVETO* and he is followed by McManus, *Guide to Ogam*, § 4.11 (p. 62).

¹⁰⁷ *ECMW*, no. 71; *CIIC* no. 341. Nash-Williams reads, in the ogam, *MAQUTRENI*, but the U is a slip for I, as shown by the drawing. McManus, *Guide to Ogam*, p. 97, § 5.31, has *SALICIDUNI*, with G in place of C, also by a slip. The stone is now in the British Museum.

In the Trallwng ogam inscription the initial CUNA- shows, by the choice of -A- rather than -O- (CUNA- for CUNO-), the development of Irish whereby the link vowel -o- was lowered and unrounded to -a-; this -a- subsequently lowered the preceding -u- to -o- and was itself lost (*cuno- > *cuna- > *cona- > con-).¹⁰⁸ This independence of the ogam-cutter vis-à-vis the Latin CVNO- suggests that Irish was for him a spoken language. On the other hand, on the Treacastle inscription, some five miles further west, the form of the name in the ogam inscription, MAQITRENI, is more archaic than the Latin MACCVTRENI, since it preserved the old *q* and *i* as against the later *c(c)* and *u*.¹⁰⁹ Here the Latin form of the name – still, of course, an Irish name even though in a Latin inscription – is closer to the probable pronunciation at the time. In this inscription, therefore, we have evidence in the ogam of an Irish orthographical tradition surviving in Brycheiniog independently both of the Latin tradition and of the pronunciation of Irish at that period.

In the sixth century, therefore, both Latin and Irish were spoken languages in Wales; both had their separate spelling conventions; both Irish and Latin were used on inscriptions and were not merely spoken languages. Brycheiniog as well as Dyfed was a kingdom of three languages. Yet Latin and Irish – both minority languages – enjoyed a higher social status than British. Only high-ranking languages were admitted to the dignity of stone.

(IV) THE OGAM INSCRIPTIONS IN IRELAND AND THE BEGINNINGS OF IRISH LITERACY

In the archaeology of the Irish Iron Age it has been said that southern Ireland is an enigma.¹¹⁰ The evidence of La Tène influence, clear in the northern half of the island, peters out in Munster and the southern half of Leinster. Indeed, apart from hillforts, good evidence on Munster and southern Leinster in the Iron Age is troublingly exiguous. For the narrative historian of the Early Christian period, there is a similar imbalance. The surviving early annals were written in the northern half of the country, or on Iona in the southern Hebrides.¹¹¹ The political history of

¹⁰⁸ McManus, *Guide to Ogam*, § 5.23. ¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, §§ 5.32, 5.33.

¹¹⁰ Raftery, *Pagan Celtic Ireland*, pp. 226–8.

¹¹¹ The Annals of Inisfallen are derived from the Clonmacnois daughter-text of the Chronicle of Ireland; they do incorporate some Munster entries for the period before 911, notably from Lismore and Emly, but whether any source constituted a full Munster chronicle is uncertain: see K. Grabowski in K. Grabowski and D. Dumville, *Chronicles and Annals of Mediaeval Ireland and Wales: The Clonmacnois-Group Texts*, Studies in Celtic History, 4 (Woodbridge, 1984), summarised at p. 94.

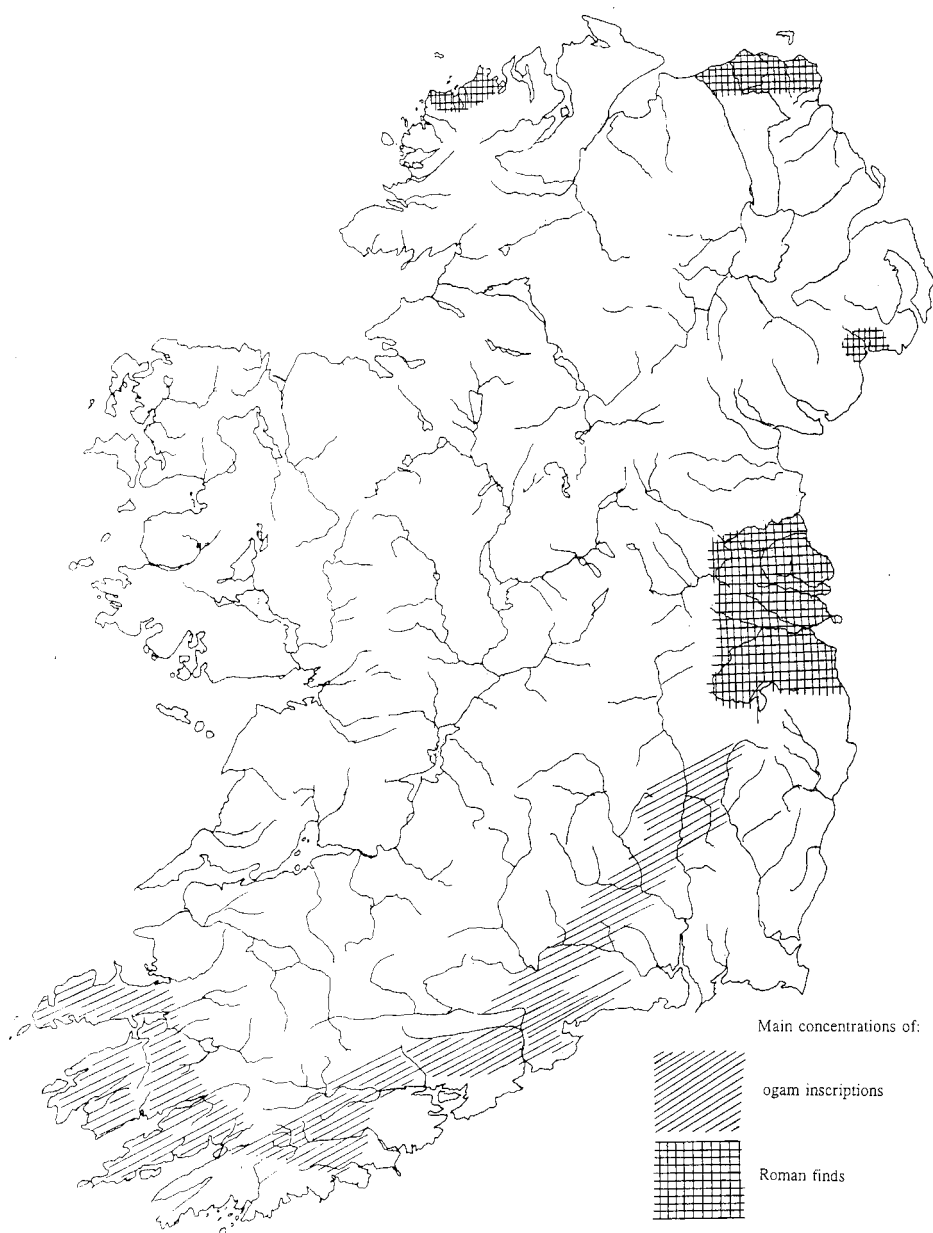
Munster and southern Leinster is very much thinner than for the lands ruled by the Uí Néill and their immediate neighbours. Even in hagiography, in the seventh and eighth centuries, there are relatively few Lives celebrating the saints of churches further south than the northern fringes of Munster and Leinster.¹¹²

For the historian this is believed to be a consequence of which texts and collections of texts happened to survive to the modern period. In the archaeological sphere the equivalent issue is which practices happen to have yielded material evidence that can be dated and plotted on a map. That Munster was not a desert at the end of the Iron Age is demonstrated by the distribution of ogam stones. These are concentrated in a belt across southern Munster from Co. Waterford in the east to Co. Kerry in the west, precisely the area from which Iron Age evidence is otherwise so scanty. Moreover, the highest concentration of all is at the western end of this belt, in the Dingle peninsula, the territory belonging to the kingdom of Corcu Duibne. The eastern districts within this ogam belt, in Co. Waterford and the eastern part of Co. Cork, were the home of peoples that were claimed (in texts written in Munster between the eighth and the tenth centuries) to have settled in western Britain; and in Co. Waterford there is another notable concentration of ogam stones.

If it is accepted that the ogam stones stem from the influence of Rome upon the Irish, the inscriptions show that that influence already extended to the far south-west of the island in the fifth and sixth centuries.¹¹³ As has been pointed out already, the practice of putting up inscriptions on stone to commemorate individuals was distinctively Roman. The extension of that practice beyond the frontier, whether in the early runic inscriptions of Scandinavia or in the ogam inscriptions of Ireland, is an instance of cultural imitation. But, in both cases, the imitation is far from obvious in detail, so that scholars have argued about the precise model. One crucial point about ogam is that it was not the same as Roman capitals and was not used for Latin but for Irish. Yet, however concealed and transmuted the imitation, it was nonetheless there. Once that is admitted, the contrast between the distributions of ogam inscriptions and of Roman artefacts in Ireland becomes especially

¹¹² The Lives of Ailbe of Emly (Co. Limerick) and of Munnu of Taghmon in southern Leinster are among the O'Donoghue Lives, probably of the eighth century: ed. Heist, *Vitae*, pp. 118–31, 198–209.

¹¹³ C. Swift, *Ogam Stones and the Earliest Christians* (Maynooth, 1997), sees much of this as Christian; this depends upon difficult questions such as the date of crosses on stones bearing ogam inscriptions. What is clear is that inscriptions bearing Latin names extended to the Corkaguiney peninsula in Co. Kerry: *ibid.*, pp. 90–6.



Map 8. Three zones of Roman influence in Ireland

striking. Roman artefacts, as we have seen, are mainly found in the later kingdom of Brega and the northern part of Leinster – that is, in the northern part of the Greater Leinster of the fifth century – but there is another, slighter cluster around the coast of Antrim. The distribution of Roman artefacts is not inconsistent, therefore, with the general northern bias of La Tène material. The contrast, however, between the ogam inscriptions and finds of Roman artefacts offers clear testimony that we are dealing with different distributions of evidence rather than an absence of settled agriculture in the south of Ireland.

The origin of the ogam alphabet lay, then, in a remarkably successful attempt to provide a written – or rather an incised – medium for the Irish language as it existed in the fourth century. This project sought to give the Irish language, and Irish inscriptional letter-forms, a status on stone equivalent to that of Latin. This equivalence is most completely expressed in the bilingual inscriptions of western Britain. On the other hand, the function of individual stones – the purpose of putting a given stone in a given place – is only known in general terms from later written evidence of the seventh and eighth centuries. This later testimony suggests that ogam stones may have served two purposes at the same time.¹¹⁴ Ogam stones appear to have been memorials of the dead individuals named in the inscriptions, but they were also often boundary marks. The link appears to have been a practice of placing the graves of dead kinsmen on the boundary of the kindred's land. The dead defended the land of the living. These graves were not, in most of the country, marked by inscriptions on stone: this epigraphic habit was a regional variant of a general custom, but it happens to be the variant which yields striking material evidence.

By the fourth and fifth centuries, the Irish dead were normally inhumated, not cremated.¹¹⁵ Bodies were buried without grave goods, lying on their backs with legs extended. This practice, not found in the late Bronze or early Iron Age, is likely to have spread from Roman Britain to Ireland. The commemoration of the dead by inscriptions on stone – itself, as we have seen, an imitation of Roman custom – may have reinforced the Roman character of burials which were already influenced by Roman practice. Moreover, the contrast between the widespread Irish

¹¹⁴ T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'Boundaries in Irish Law', in P. H. Sawyer (ed.), *Medieval Settlement: Continuity and Change* (London, 1976), pp. 83–7.

¹¹⁵ E. O'Brien, 'Pagan and Christian Burial in Ireland during the First Millennium AD: Continuity and Change', in N. Edwards and A. Lane (eds.), *The Early Church in Wales and the West*, Oxbow Monograph 16 (Oxford, 1992), pp. 130–62.

distribution of extended supine inhumation and the more limited southern distribution of ogam inscriptions shows yet again that the spatial extent of a given custom can be deceptive if it not balanced by other evidence.

(V) THE LATIN CULTURE OF IRELAND AND BRITAIN
BEFORE 600

The ogam inscriptions demonstrate a wish to give the Irish language a high status alongside Latin. In the event, however, it was only by adopting the Latin alphabet and Latin book-scripts that written literature and scholarship could make much progress. At first, this progress was probably mainly in Latin, but from the seventh century it was also evident in Irish. The earliest Latin culture of Ireland was heavily indebted to that of Britain, but the attitude to the vernacular was more independent.

Two linked developments in Britain explain the broad character of the earliest Irish Latin. First, the Church took over responsibility for education from local *civitates*, such as that of the Demetae. Education was provided for prospective clerics but also sometimes for men who ended up as laymen. As Gildas' *On the Ruin of Britain* shows in the sixth century, a king such as Maglocunus (Maelgwn) might receive the highest education available.¹¹⁶ The shift of education from a civic to an ecclesiastical responsibility was a general feature of the former north-western provinces of the Empire.¹¹⁷ What was different about Britain was, first, that many Britons were not native speakers of Latin; indeed, the problem for post-Roman Britain is to show that some at least continued to speak Latin. The emergence of Welsh and Cornish shows that, in terms of spoken languages, the vernacular was winning the day against Latin. Latin, however, was the language of the Church. Not only was its liturgy in Latin, so also was the religious culture bequeathed by the Latin Fathers of the Church. The Bible was in Latin; so were the standard commentaries by men such as Jerome, Augustine and Ambrose. Moreover, whatever their protestations, Jerome and Augustine continued to deploy the techniques of literary analysis that they had learnt while reading Virgil in the school of the *grammaticus* and the techniques of persuasive and refined Latin that they had subsequently learnt from the *rhétor*. The British Church, therefore, needed to organise the teaching of Latin to

¹¹⁶ Gildas, *De Excidio*, ed. Winterbottom, c. 36.

¹¹⁷ P. Riché, *Education et culture dans l'occident barbare, VI^e–VIII^e siècles*, 3rd edn (Paris, 1982), pp. 89–90, 254.

those who spoke only British. It could not rely on a dwindling number of Latin speakers – those whose native language, had it survived beyond the seventh century, would have been a British sister-language to French and the other Romance languages.

On the continent, in Gaul, Italy and Spain, the Church did not face the same problem. It was not until the Carolingian period, in the eighth and ninth centuries, that it began systematically to give a Christian education to native speakers of German; and then its model was provided mainly by Anglo-Saxon missionaries, themselves pupils of the Irish. It is surprising but true that, on the continent, the Christian Latin culture of the fourth and fifth centuries decayed, more in some places than in others, because the Church relied on recruiting its clergy from a Latin-speaking population. The language the clergy spoke was increasingly remote from the standard Latin employed in the major works of Latin Christianity. Both priest and people spoke Latin, the language of the liturgy; and priests are likely to have pronounced liturgical Latin as the language was generally spoken.¹¹⁸ The Church, therefore, did not need to develop a full-scale replacement for the education of Late Antiquity.

The need faced by the British Church was also its opportunity. The syllabus of Late Antique education was essentially unchanged since the Hellenistic period. It was not merely thoroughly literary – the mathematical priorities of a Plato had long been abandoned – it was also pagan. This fact did not escape contemporaries. Augustine, in his *De Doctrina Christiana*, advocated a reconstruction of the old syllabus. There would still be a central text; this text would still be studied by many of the old interpretative methods; but the text would no longer be Virgil's *Aeneid* but the Bible. What Augustine proposed the British Church put into effect. The principal pieces of evidence for this assertion are the Briton Gildas and the Irishman Columbanus, separated by a generation but witnesses to Insular culture on both sides of the Irish Sea.

The range of reading in classical Latin authors revealed by Gildas' work and those of Columbanus is modest. Virgil is the only non-Christian poet they can be shown to have read.¹¹⁹ Their knowledge of the classics was greatly inferior to that enjoyed by another contemporary,

¹¹⁸ R. Wright, *Late Latin and Early Romance in Spain and Carolingian France* (Liverpool, 1982), chapters 1–2.

¹¹⁹ N. Wright, 'Gildas's Prose Style and its Origins', in Lapidge and Dumville (eds.), *Gildas: New Approaches*, pp. 112–14; M. Lapidge (ed.), *Columbanus: Studies on the Latin Writings*, pp. 66–87, 278–81. For an interesting argument that one of the earliest manuscripts of Virgil, the *Vergilius Romanus*, may have been produced in Britain, see K. R. Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom: British Political Continuity 300–800*, Studies in the Early History of Britain (Leicester, 1994), pp. 185–91.

Venantius Fortunatus, educated at Ravenna, who ended his days as bishop of Poitiers.¹²⁰ But this did not imply that either Columbanus or Gildas had turned their backs on the art of rhetoric, the culmination of Late Antique education. Both were capable of writing highly crafted prose; for neither of them was a complex style inconsistent with a practical purpose. Gildas's *On the Ruin of Britain* was a plea for spiritual reform based on the premise that from moral corruption came national disaster. To address the leaders of the people, both lay and ecclesiastical, in the last days before God's vengeance would come upon them and upon their subjects, it was appropriate to use a convoluted and heightened style of Latin.¹²¹ Gildas must have expected to be, not just understood, but more persuasive because his Latin was more complex and more oratorical, for the danger he believed to be imminent was not some imaginary threat: it was the English.

British education, therefore, in the fifth and sixth centuries – the period when loanwords from British Latin into Irish reveal the enduring influence of British missionaries on the nascent Irish Christianity – retained skill in the use of a language, Latin, as a prime objective. Simplicity, absence of rhetorical ornament, was not a virtue. From Gildas, whose principal arguments came from the Bible, and for whom exegesis was the necessary tool of a preacher, we can see that much of ancient education was taken over into this new Christian Latin culture. The skills in elucidating a text, taught by the *grammaticus* as he slowly took his pupils through Virgil, were always going to be essential in Christian education, since the interpretation of a text, the Bible, was the supreme intellectual task. What is striking, however, is that the skills taught by the *rhetor* were as welcome as those taught by the *grammaticus*; and the prime reason was that preaching was believed to be more powerful if it employed a heightened Latin style.

Columbanus, a native of Leinster born when Gildas was already middle-aged, was directly indebted to his British predecessor's Latin style, which he praised in a letter to Pope Gregory the Great.¹²² His Life

¹²⁰ J. W. George, *Venantius Fortunatus: A Poet in Merovingian Gaul* (Oxford, 1992), p. 21 (based on Manitius's index to Leo's edn).

¹²¹ F. Kerlouégan, *Le De Excidio Britanniae de Gildas: Les destinées de la culture latine dans l'île de Bretagne au VII^e siècle* (Paris, 1987), Part II and the summary, pp. 470–6.

¹²² Columbanus, *Ep.* i.7 (ed. Walker, pp. 8–9). For the debt, see M. Winterbottom, 'Columbanus and Gildas', *Vigiliae Christianae*, 30 (1976), 310–17; N. Wright, 'Columbanus's *Epistulae*', pp. 82–7; Stancliffe, 'The Thirteen Sermons Attributed to Columbanus', p. 109. On the other hand, the two styles were clearly different; for example, Gildas used rhythmical clausulae whereas Columbanus did not: G. Orlandi, 'Clausulae in Gildas' *De Excidio Britanniae*', in Lapidge and Dumville (eds.), *Gildas: New Approaches*, pp. 129–49; Stancliffe, 'The Thirteen Sermons Attributed to Columbanus', pp. 150–60.

Table 4.1. *Colombanus' education*

	Roman education	Columbanus' education
primary	7–11/12	[end of <i>infantia</i> or beginning of <i>pueritia</i>]
grammaticus	11/12–15/16	<i>pueritia</i> + <i>adolescentia</i>
rheto	15/16–20+	exegesis: <i>adolescentia</i>

by Jonas (Ionas) of Susa gives a most important account of the saint's education.¹²³ Its pattern – organised according to the traditional ages of man – would have been clearly recognisable two centuries earlier. Although Columbanus' education must have begun with the instruction in reading and writing characteristic of the first stage of Roman education, this seems to be beneath Jonas' notice. Columbanus then progressed in his boyhood, *pueritia*, to 'the teaching of letters befitting a freeman', *liberalium litterarum doctrinae*, and 'studies of the grammarians', *grammaticorum studia*, the second stage which lasted into adolescence. All of this took place in his native Leinster. Subsequently he left Leinster and went to a teacher called Sinilis (Sinell). With him he studied 'the knowledge of the sacred scriptures', *scripturarum sacrarum scientia*, to such effect that before his adolescence was over he had written a commentary on the Psalms *elevato sermone*, 'in a distinguished style'.¹²⁴ The different periods of education are compared in table 4.1.¹²⁵ If we leave aside the first stage, learning to read and write, we are left with an apparent identity in the second stage – grammar – and a clear difference in the third, the study of the Bible has taken the place of learning the arts of the orator. Moreover, the second and third stages, those to which Jonas pays attention, are particularly clearly distinct in Columbanus' case, since he studied grammar and liberal letters in Leinster, but exegesis outside his native province. Finally, it is important to remember that, although Jonas was not an Irishman, he certainly had Irish informants who knew Columbanus personally: his text shows that he used them for his account of the saint's early life in Ireland, and that he was writing only a generation after Columbanus' death.¹²⁶

Yet there remain problems. Columbanus' own writings show that his education included a training in the art of persuasive writing in Latin.

¹²³ Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, i.3 (ed. Krusch, p. 155).

¹²⁴ Krusch's text (p. 158.12) has *elimato sermone* where *elimato* = *elevato*.

¹²⁵ H.-I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity* (London, 1956), p. 265.

¹²⁶ See below pp. 351, 353

What may, therefore, have happened is that grammar and rhetoric were combined in a single stage, in order to make room for exegesis as the culmination of education. Rhetoric may be included under the umbrella term 'liberal letters', as is suggested by the list given later in the same chapter: 'grammar, rhetoric, geometry'. In this latter list, however, is included 'the series of the divine scriptures', as if Columbanus had also studied scripture in his first period of education in Leinster, and not just at the school of Sinilis. Some study of the Bible must probably be allowed for at the earlier stages of Irish education, as elsewhere in Christian Europe: the Psalms in particular were learnt by heart at an early stage, and were thus useful when teaching children to read and write.¹²⁷ Such a context may explain the Springmount Bog tablets which contain parts of three Psalms.¹²⁸ Also relevant is the use by Christian Latin grammarians of scriptural and patristic examples.

Confirmation of this broad division of early Irish education into two stages, after the elementary one in which the elements of Latin were learnt, comes from the subject-matter of the *Hisperica Famina*, which suggests an origin in the school of a grammarian; from the scholastic colloquies, which appear to have the same home; and from the character of Cummián's Letter to Ségéne and Béccán on the paschal question, which is both rhetorical and argues as one exegete to another.¹²⁹ Similarly much of the *Amra Choluim Chille* celebrates Columba's learning as an exegete.¹³⁰ Bede's account of Englishmen resorting to Irish schools in the period 651–64 envisages them as going to study exegesis.¹³¹ When he praises Aldfrith, king of Northumbria, for the learning he obtained in Ireland before he became king, he describes him as 'most learned in the Scriptures'.¹³² Some of the intellectual procedures of Irish exegesis suggest that the authors had had a grounding in Latin grammar, for example the formula used for explaining texts: the reader should investigate the date and place of composition, the identity of the author and the reason why the text was written, *tempus, locus, persona, et causa scribendi*.¹³³

¹²⁷ Bede, *HE* iii.5.

¹²⁸ Lowe, *Codices Latini Antiquiores*, Suppl. no. 1684. The script is skilful and must be that of a teacher rather than of a beginner (for guidance on this point I am indebted to my wife).

¹²⁹ See below, pp. 402–4.

¹³⁰ See below, pp. 286–8.

¹³¹ Bede, *HE* iii.27.

¹³² *Ibid.*, iv.26/24.

¹³³ Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi*, in *Sulpicii Severi Libri qui supersunt*, ed. C. Halm, CSEL i (Vienna, 1866–7), 2, 7; B. Bischoff, 'Wendepunkte in der Geschichte der lateinischen Exegese im Frühmittelalter', *Sacris Erudiri*, 6 (1954), 206–9, repr. in his *Mittelalterliche Studien* (Stuttgart, 1966–7, 1981), i.217–18.

Although there were apparently two distinct stages in education, and perhaps any one teacher would only cover one stage, the pre-eminent goal was knowledge of the Bible. For this reason the laws envisage a single hierarchy of Latin learning, that of the *ecnae* headed by the *suí litre*.¹³⁴ They do not make it clear which of these grades may have taught grammar. The *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* makes it clear that the scriptural scholar was responsible for much of Irish canon law and was also charged with exercising the function of an ecclesiastical judge. Partly as a consequence, leading scholars had the right to participate in ecclesiastical synods. We find some, for example, among the participants in the all-Irish assembly convened by Adomnán at Birr in 697. Scriptural scholarship thus had an even more central position in the early Irish Church than in other Churches at the time. Not merely was knowledge of the Bible the accepted goal of the higher levels of education, but the expertise of a *sapiens* entitled him to sit in authority alongside bishops and the abbots of the greater monasteries. The Irish Church was ruled by synods, so the right to participate was crucial. It was, no doubt, partly for this reason that several bishops and abbots, and even the odd king, were also *sapientes*.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ *Uraicecht na Ríar*, ed. Breatnach, p. 84; *Míadsleachta*, CIH 586.

¹³⁵ AU 847 calls Feidilmid mac Crimthainn, king of Munster, both *scriba* and anchorite (by this period *scriba*, probably equivalent to *suí litre*, had largely ousted *sapiens* in the annals).

CHAPTER FIVE

Conversion to Christianity

Early in the fifth century there were already Irish Christians. We know of them because they were one reason for the first known mission to a country beyond the frontier of the Western Roman Empire.¹ In 431 Palladius, a deacon, perhaps of the church of Auxerre, was consecrated bishop and sent to Ireland by Pope Celestine. When, in the early seventh century, the Irishman Columbanus had occasion to write to Pope Boniface, he recalled this Roman mission to his native island:

For all we Irish, inhabitants of the world's edge, are disciples of Saints Peter and Paul and of all the disciples who, by the Holy Spirit, wrote the divine scripture, and we accept nothing outside the evangelical and apostolic teaching; not one has been a heretic, not one a Judaiser, not one a schismatic, but the Catholic Faith as it was given to us first by you, that is the successors of the holy apostles, is preserved intact.²

More than a century later, the Northumbrian historian Bede also remembered Palladius as the first missionary bishop of the Irish.³ One tradition about the conversion of the Irish was therefore centred upon this man sent to Ireland by the bishop of Rome.

For most men, however, from the seventh century, the apostle of the Irish was the Briton, Patrick. A hymn composed in his honour, possibly about 600, described him as the Irish St Peter, the chief apostle of the country.⁴ When, at the end of the seventh century, this hymn was copied at the monastery of Bangor near Belfast, the heading called Patrick 'the

¹ Prosper, *Chronicle*, s.a. 431 (ed. Th. Mommsen, *Chronica Minora*, i, MGH AA 9, Berlin, 1892, p. 473). The conversion of the Irish is set in a wider context in the major recent work by R. A. Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe: From Paganism to Christianity 371–1386 AD* (London, 1997), esp. pp. 78–96.

² Columbanus, *Ep.* v.3 (ed. Walker, *S. Columbani Opera*, p. 38). Columbanus call the pope and his predecessors 'successors of the holy apostles' in the plural because he is thinking, not just of St Peter, but of St Peter and St Paul, both believed to have been buried at Rome, the 'two columns of the Church' to use a phrase echoed by the *Liber Angeli* when it called Patrick and Brigit 'columns of the Irish', § 32. ³ Bede, *HE* i.13.

⁴ The Hymn of Secundinus, ed. Bieler, *PRIA*, 55 c (1952–3), 117–27. The ascription to Colmán Elo (ob. 611), based on a marginal gloss in the Book of Armagh (Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, p. 166, v.l. to line 14, but which Bieler takes to refer to line 11, 'ymnum eius per totum tempus canere'), is

teacher of the Irish'.⁵ Already by the seventh century this perception of Patrick was widespread; it was certainly not confined to those particular churches owing an allegiance to the saint. In a letter written in 632 or 633, addressed to Ségéne, abbot of Iona, and the hermit Béccán, Cumman referred to Patrick as 'our father', 'our *papa*'.⁶ No later than a generation after Columbanus' letter to Pope Boniface, therefore, Patrick was widely accepted as the pre-eminent apostle of the Irish.

(I) THE EVIDENCE

The conversion of the Irish may, therefore, have been perceived differently by different people from a very early period. This reflects the fortunate circumstance that the evidence, although fragmentary and sparse, is none the less rich enough to support different interpretations. There is excellent external evidence to show why Palladius was sent to Ireland and what those who had sent him thought he had achieved. We have the contemporary Roman view of Palladius, something of especial value precisely because it was Rome that had sent him to Ireland. We do not, however, know what those on the spot in Ireland thought of Palladius. Columbanus' words, written nearly two hundred years later, are the first Irish evidence for his activities. They are consistent with the fifth-century papal view; but after all, Columbanus was writing to a pope and may himself have read the chronicle of Prosper, which records Palladius' mission.

The contemporary evidence for Patrick is the precise opposite of that for Palladius. We have nothing by others on Patrick, but we do have two works by Patrick himself, the *Confessio* and the *Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus*.⁷ They are exceptionally revealing documents – revealing, that is, about Patrick's personality, his culture and his conception of his mission; they reveal very little, except in passing, about what he did and where he was active. As for when he lived and died, that has been a

attractive but uncertain; see J. Carney, *The Problem of St Patrick* (Dublin, 1961), pp. 42–3; Binchy, 'Patrick and his Biographers', 55; C. Doherty, 'The Cult of St Patrick', 88–9; A. P. McD., Orchard, "'Audite omnes amantes" a Hymn in Patrick's Praise', in D. Dumville *et al.*, *Saint Patrick, AD 493–1993* (Woodbridge, 1993), pp. 161–2.

⁵ *The Antiphonary of Bangor*, ed. F. E. Warren, 2 vols., Henry Bradshaw Society 4 and 10 (London, 1893–5), ii. 14–16. ⁶ Cumman, *De Controversia Paschali*, ed. Walsh and Ó Cróinín, lines 208–9.

⁷ The standard edn is by L. Bieler, *Libri Epistolarum S. Patricii Episcopi*, in *Classica et Mediaevalia*, 11 (1950), 1–150, and 12 (1951), 79–214; reprinted by the Irish Manuscripts Commission (Dublin, 1952); reprinted by the Royal Irish Academy (Dublin, 1993). A very useful edn. is that by R. P. C. Hanson and C. Blanc, *Saint Patrick: Confession et Lettre à Coroticus*, SC 249 (Paris, 1978); for the structure of Patrick's works the edn by D. R. Howlett, *The Book of Letters of Saint Patrick the Bishop* (Blackrock, Co. Dublin, 1994), is indispensable.

matter of controversy for much of the twentieth century. Ancient and early medieval biography sometimes distinguishes between someone's 'deeds', public actions, and his 'Life', meaning by the latter term a static, virtually timeless character sketch. In this sense we have an excellent idea of the Life, but very little notion of the Deeds of Patrick. We know the inner man, not the public career. There are, of course, the late seventh-century accounts by Tírechán and Muirchú, but they appear to have had little or no reliable information other than that to be inferred from Patrick's own writings.⁸

Evidence of a different kind is, however, invaluable in defining the broad context within which Palladius and Patrick worked. Conversion to Christianity was accompanied by a flow of Latin words into Irish. The bulk of these loanwords, at least, came from the British dialect of Latin, as can be shown from the way in which they were affected by the pronunciation of the native Celtic language of Britain, normally called British.⁹ When they had been borrowed into Irish, these loanwords began to be subject to the phonological development of the host-language, Irish. As a result, it has been possible to show that the flow of Latin loanwords continued apace during both the fifth and the sixth centuries.¹⁰ They prove conclusively that the main base for the Christian missionaries in Ireland was Britain, not Gaul, still less any other part of the Empire.

A particular category of loanword also provides an outline impression of the organisation of the Irish Church as it emerged in the fifth and sixth centuries. In Old Irish, from c. 600 onwards, the standard word for the complex of church buildings, including both the church itself – often called the 'oratory' to distinguish it from the rest – and the buildings in which the clergy lived, was *cell*, a borrowing from Latin *cella*. It is this word, in the later form *cill*, which has given the numerous place-names in *kill* or *kil* in Ireland and Scotland.¹¹ An earlier equivalent to *cell* was, however, *domnach*, again a Latin loanword, from *dominicum* 'the Lord's place'. *Dominicum* was the Latin counterpart to Greek *kuriakon*, of the same meaning, the word that yielded English *church*, Scottish *kirk* and

⁸ Binchy, 'Patrick and his Biographers', 7–173, followed by R. P. C. Hanson, *Saint Patrick: His Origins and Career* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 75–96, and E. A. Thompson, *Who Was Saint Patrick?* (Woodbridge, 1985), pp. xiii–xiv. ⁹ Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain*, pp. 122–48.

¹⁰ McManus, 'The Chronology of Latin Loan Words', 21–71. It used to be thought that there were two distinct phases, usually labelled the Cothriche and Pádraig phases after the earlier and later borrowings of the name Patricius, and that there might have been a gap between the two phases; McManus has shown that there were numerous chronological layers and no gap.

¹¹ W. F. H. Nicolaisen, *Scottish Place-Names* (London, 1976), pp. 128–35, 143–4; W. J. Watson, *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1926), ch. 9.

German *Kirche*. *Domnach* is found quite widely in Ireland, especially in the eastern parts of the country, but not in Gaelic Scotland.¹² The Latin parent-word, *dominicum*, went out of use after the fifth century;¹³ its Irish daughter, *domnach*, was probably no longer a current term, applicable to new foundations, after 500; otherwise one would expect to find it used in Scotland. It thus provides a clue to the local organisation of the Irish Church in its first century.

(II) CONVERSION AND CULTURE

As the loanwords show, and as Patrick's writings illustrate, the principal context of the conversion of Ireland was the relationship between Ireland and Britain. The conversion of Ireland is, perhaps, the surest evidence that Britain itself was now dominated by Christianity – a domination unlikely to have been established before 400.¹⁴ On the other hand, a series of outstanding British Christians in the fifth century, beginning with Pelagius and continuing with Faustus of Riez and Patrick himself, suggests a settled Christian background. This suggests that although, as in Gaul, there will have been numerous pagans or semi-pagans, Christianity was politically dominant and numerically strong within Britain by the fifth century and was untroubled by the disappearance of imperial authority. As in Gaul, the earlier strength of Christianity was probably in the towns, of paganism among those of lower rank in the countryside; yet when town life declined in Britain in the fifth century the predominance of Christianity appears not to have been threatened. When Germanus, bishop of Auxerre, visited Britain in 429, he did so to combat Pelagians rather than pagans.¹⁵ Inscriptions

¹² D. Flanagan, 'The Christian Impact on Early Ireland: The Place-Name Evidence', in Ní Chatháin and Richter (eds.), *Ireland und Europa*, pp. 25–31.

¹³ C. Mohrmann, *The Latin of Saint Patrick* (Dublin, 1961), pp. 29–31 ('it could hardly be later than the first half of the fifth century', p. 31). The general use of *llan* in Welsh has obscured the earlier situation there.

¹⁴ Salway, *Roman Britain*, pp. 716–39, argues that British paganism remained strong into the fifth century. The argument about St Patrick on pp. 734–5 fails, however, to take account of the evidence indicating that Patrick was only the most distinguished participant in a major British effort at converting Ireland. K. R. Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom: British Political Continuity 300–800*, Studies in the Early History of Britain (Leicester, 1994), pp. 30–9, argues that the prominence of paganism in the fourth-century archaeological record is due to it having remained the religion of the elite, while Christianity was strong in the lower classes.

¹⁵ Constantius, *Vita S. Germani Autissiodorensis*, c. 14 (ed. R. Borius, *Constance de Lyon: Vie de Saint Germain*, SC 112, Paris, 1965, pp. 148–51). E. A. Thompson, *Saint Germanus of Auxerre and the End of Roman Britain* (Woodbridge, 1984), pp. 15–19, makes a contrast between townspeople, mainly Latin-speaking and Christian, and peasants, largely British-speaking and pagan; the army he sees as mainly Christian. In his view, Germanus, preaching in Latin, was necessarily speaking only to the townspeople and the army.

show that Christianity had also spread beyond Hadrian's Wall in the fifth century. Some of the most striking are in the south-west extremity of Scotland, only a few miles from Ireland across the short sea-crossing between Galloway and Antrim and Down.¹⁶ The new religion appears, therefore, to have made very rapid strides in Britain in the last years of the fourth century and the first years of the fifth. Even the Picts may – depending on an ambiguous phrase used by Patrick – have included groups of Christians or ex-Christians.¹⁷ The beginnings of the mission to Ireland thus immediately followed the conversion of Britain; indeed, in the countryside, the conversion of Britain was no doubt far from complete. The main effort involved in the conversion of Ireland, therefore, was borne by a British Church itself thoroughly conversant with the problems of preaching the Christian gospel to people whose gods were often identical with those revered by the Irish.¹⁸

Conversion to Christianity was a huge cultural change, bringing in its train a quite different attitude to writing and also an international language, Latin, containing immense intellectual resources as well as being the language of liturgy and sacred scripture. In these terms, the changes were much greater in Ireland than in Britain. True, some Irishmen must have been conversant with Latin before Palladius set foot in the island, but even on the most optimistic estimates such limited knowledge was very different from the situation in Britain, where Latin had been a dominant cultural force for centuries.¹⁹ This would be the main difference between converting the Irish and converting the Britons. The gods were not unfamiliar: Roman and Greek equivalents for some of the main Celtic gods had been found centuries earlier.²⁰ Admittedly, the Irish ones had acquired local associations which may have proved serious obstacles to conversion. For example, the ruling group of much of the south-west of Co. Cork was the Corcu Loígde, 'the *gens* of the Calf Goddess' (**Loigodēwā*).²¹ But similar problems will have arisen in Britain, for example with the association between the Brigantes and the goddess

¹⁶ C. Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain to AD 500* (London, 1981), pp. 283–5.

¹⁷ The 'apostate Picts' of Patrick, *Ep.* 2; for discussion see P. Grosjean, 'Les Pictes apostats dans l'épître de S. Patrice', *AB*, 76 (1958), 354–78, esp. 375–6.

¹⁸ So, for example, the Welsh Lleu is the Irish Lug, the Welsh Manawydan is the Irish Manannán: Mac Cana, *Celtic Mythology*, 27–9, 69–73, 76, 79–80.

¹⁹ A. Harvey, 'Early Literacy in Ireland: The Evidence from Ogam', *CMCS*, 14 (Winter 1987), 1–15; see above, pp. 165–6.

²⁰ For this *interpretatio Romana* see M. Henig, *Religion in Roman Britain* (London, 1984), chap. 3; Mac Cana, *Celtic Mythology*, pp. 23–44; G. Webster, *The British Celts and their Gods under Rome* (London, 1986), pp. 40–3.

²¹ O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology*, p. 3.

Brigantia and her male counterpart Brigans.²² According to Ptolemy (perhaps referring to first-century AD conditions), there was also a people named Brigantes in Ireland, possibly to be located in Leinster; this province later enjoyed the patronage of Brigit, a saint whose cult probably owes something at least to that of the Celtic goddess whose name she shares.²³

Contemporary evidence is, unfortunately, particularly scarce. Patrick's *Confessio* was primarily addressed, as we shall see, to a British readership, only secondarily to his clerical followers in Ireland, many of whom would themselves have been Britons. His *Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus* was likewise primarily for British readers. Both are thus more directly informative about British than about Irish culture. Inscriptions afford some assistance, but in the main we have to rely on what we know of the end-result of the process. The cultural mix of the seventh and eighth centuries, about which we can know quite a lot, shows the long-term effects of conversion. This, together with the contemporary evidence, can give a broad impression of the cultural response to Christianity in Ireland.

A similar approach can be adopted in order to give a social and political context to the conversion. Again, good and extensive written evidence only becomes available from the seventh century; but Patrick's writings suggest that the broad characteristics of Irish society had not changed between the fifth and the seventh century. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the most striking changes in material culture occurred just before and during the early stages of conversion. The archaeological evidence does not suggest that there was a major change between the period in which conversion got under way and the late seventh century when we begin to get most of the laws and hagiography. In any case, use of seventh-century evidence for the nature of Irish society is not open to the same fatal objections that have been raised against inferences from Muirchú or Tírechán about the events of Patrick's career. The broad features of society change only slowly, whereas no secure deductions about the history of events can be made from the uncorroborated testimony of writers separated by two centuries from their subject.

What seventh-century evidence would lead us to expect, very briefly, would be a country divided into many small kingdoms, themselves combined into less stable overkingdoms. The small kingdoms are confirmed

²² T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'Native Political Organization in Roman Britain and the Origins of Middle Welsh *Brenhin*', in M. Mayhofer *et al.* (eds.), *Antiquitates Indogermanicae* (Innsbruck, 1974), 35–45, at 39–44. ²³ Mac Cana, *Celtic Mythology*, pp. 34–5.

by Patrick's writings, but there is no contemporary evidence for the over-kingdoms.²⁴ Within each small kingdom, the population was organised into distinct hierarchies of status, one for the ordinary people supported by agricultural labour, others for the various orders that supported themselves by their professional skills. Since these hierarchies were distinct, a crucial question was how to relate them to each other. In practice, some hierarchies were more central than others, in that men tended to compare other hierarchies to the more central ones rather than the central hierarchies to the peripheral ones. In material terms, the lay hierarchy, namely that based directly on agriculture and headed by 'the grades of lordship', was central; the professional orders derived their protection and their economic support from the lay hierarchy. In ideological terms, however, the Church hierarchy was central by the seventh century: even the lay grades, let alone those of other professional orders, were presented in a way in which they could match those of the Church.²⁵ The material centrality of the lay hierarchy must have endured throughout the period of conversion, since it was inherent in the social system. Its ideological counterpart, however, cannot have done so; for, in Patrick's day, the Christian Church in the west of Ireland still remained more effective in preaching to the more marginal elements of society, to slaves, children of living parents and women.²⁶ Any domination of the west by the new religion must have come later, perhaps in the first half of the sixth century. The detailed correspondences between ecclesiastical and other ranks appear, therefore, to stem from a deliberate and widely disseminated response to the new position of the Church in Irish society: conversion meant that the Church had to be incorporated into the status system. Moreover, since the Church's ideological claims were the highest within society, status was now to be based upon a sevenfold hierarchy perceived as deriving from the Church.

Patrick's references to his difficulties in obtaining enough security and freedom of movement from those with power in order to pursue his task of evangelisation suggest a distinction between the power of kings and that of the professional orders. On the one hand, he had to give gifts to kings in order to allow him to travel;²⁷ on the other hand, he also had to

²⁴ Cf. the *reguli* of *Confessio*, 41, *Epistola*, 12; 'many peoples' are being converted through Patrick, *Confessio*, 38; these 'populi multi' would, in Old Irish, be *ilthúatha*.

²⁵ For the parallelism between the grades of the Church and those of the *filid*, see *Uraicecht na Ríar*, ed. Breatnach, pp. 81–9, and see above, pp. 130–1.

²⁶ *Confessio*, 42, on parental pressure on those who wished to remain celibate, and also on the special sufferings of Christian slaves. For the location of Patrick in the west of Ireland, see below, pp. 215–17, 237. ²⁷ *Confessio*, 52.

give much 'to those who were judging throughout all the districts that I was visiting'.²⁸ The passages concerning kings and judges are contiguous, which may suggest that Patrick intended some distinction between the two. Moreover, although it has been argued that Patrick was referring to judges in an Old Testament sense by which 'judge' meant no more than 'non-royal ruler', detailed scrutiny of the biblical parallels shows that Patrick is much more likely to have been using it for someone who did indeed exercise judicial responsibilities.²⁹ His evidence does not allow us to say whether these men were called 'judges' in Irish (Old Irish *brithemain*) or were druids or others exercising judicial powers. The crucial point is that, apart from kings, there were others whose power was probably derived from a professional skill and who were crucial to Patrick's ability to preach.³⁰

Another strategy used to throw light on the conditions faced by Christian missionaries in Ireland has been to scrutinise ancient accounts of Celtic society. These are mainly about continental Celts, but some striking correspondences with later Irish texts have encouraged scholars to suppose that, in spite of the long centuries and many miles between fifth-century Irishmen and first-century BC Celts, illumination is to be derived from the descriptions of such authors as the Stoic Posidonius and the general and politician Julius Caesar.³¹ Again, providing one keeps to very general and fundamental aspects of society and uses the evidence as suggestive rather than decisive, this approach can be helpful. The accounts of such ancient writers suggest that one of the main differences between the Celts and their neighbours lay in the prominence and power of the professional orders, above all the druids. The latter are described as priests but also as the intellectual elite of Celtic society. In the terms used by ancient writers, the druid was both priest and 'philosopher', that is, a person who devoted himself to the

²⁸ Ibid., 53.

²⁹ The best parallel for Patrick's use of *iudicare per omnes regiones* is Deut. 16:18; as the reference there to judges at the gates shows, the meaning is indeed 'judge' and not 'chieftain' as Bieler would have it (commentary on *Confessio*, 41.4).

³⁰ On the importance of the learned orders for the character of the conversion of Ireland, see C. Stancliffe, 'Kings and Conversion: Some Comparisons between the Roman Mission to England and Patrick's to Ireland', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 14 (1980), 59–94, esp. 78–89.

³¹ J. J. Tierney, 'The Celtic Ethnography of Poseidonius', *PRLA*, 60 c (1959–60), 189–275, exploited by K. H. Jackson, *The Oldest Irish Tradition: A Window on the Iron Age* (Cambridge, 1964), *passim*. There are, however, serious archaeological objections to taking the Old Irish Ulster sagas as evidence for any precise details of Iron Age Ireland: see J. P. Mallory, 'The Sword of the Ulster Cycle', in B. G. Scott (ed.), *Studies on Early Ireland: Essays in Honour of M. V. Duignan* (Belfast, 1982), 99–114; idem, 'The World of Cú Chulainn: The Archaeology of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*', in J. P. Mallory (ed.), *Aspects of the Táin* (Belfast, 1992), pp. 103–53.

pursuit of the truth about the nature of the world.³² Caesar describes an annual festival, in the country of the Carnutes, attended by Gauls from every territory and controlled by the druids.³³ At this festival, legal cases were decided and political issues discussed. A principal source of the power of the druids, according to Caesar, was their power to excommunicate people from participation in this festival and thus from the many activities of which it was composed. A possible counterpart in Ireland is the *óenach*, assembly and fair, of Tailtiu. This is usually thought to have been the assembly of the Uí Néill, but the annals, supported by other evidence, suggest that attendance was not restricted to the lands ruled by the Uí Néill.³⁴ It will be argued in a later chapter that the Fair of Tailtiu also acquired an ecclesiastical component. In a characteristically brilliant suggestion, Mac Neill raised the possibility that the application of the term *nemed* ('sacred') to all categories of freemen in some legal texts was to be explained by Caesar's account of the assembly in the land of the Carnutes: a person who was *nemed* was entitled to attend this assembly, part fair, part court, part religious meeting.³⁵ Someone who was not *nemed* was in a comparable position to the person excommunicated by the Gaulish druids. It is unlikely that this suggestion will ever come anywhere near to being proved, yet it remains exceedingly plausible.

There are enough references to druids in seventh and eighth-century Irish sources to make it plain that they were considered to have formed a powerful group in Irish society, but to have lost that position as a result of conversion.³⁶ This sense of the *druí* as the principal opposition to Christianity appears to have been carried by Irish missionaries to England in the seventh century, as indicated by the borrowing of *druí*

³² S. Piggott, *The Druids* (London, 1968), pp. 102–3, 109, 112–13.

³³ Caesar, *De Bello Gallico*, vi.13.10.

³⁴ Cf. the role of Tallaght (a Leinster monastery) in AU 811.2; 'A Poem on the Airgialla', ed. M. O Daly, *Ériu*, 16 (1952), 179–88, stanzas 1–4, assume that the provincial kings of Ireland might attend the Fair of Tailtiu. In AU 827.6, a king of Leinster who came from the Uí Fáeláin attacked the Laigin Desgabair at the Fair of Colmán: presumably this was Colmán of Lynally, whose fair was one of the three principal fairs of Ireland according to *The Triads of Ireland*, ed. K. Meyer, Royal Irish Academy, Todd Lecture Series 13 (Dublin, 1906), no. 35. Lynally (grid ref.: N 29 23) was in Uí Néill territory (Fir Chell: *Fél.*² Notes, 3 October, p. 220); but note CGH i.230 (152 a 10), which refers to a *circium* of Colmán in Life, namely the plain of Liffey, around Naas and Kildare. O'Brien, in the index of places, took *circium* to mean *óenach*, but this is normally *agon* in the annals. *Circium* may perhaps refer to the horse-racing that was a normal part of an *óenach*; for the word *circium* and its probable association with horse-racing, cf. AU 800.4.

³⁵ E. Mac Neill, 'Ancient Irish Law: The Law of Status or Franchise', *PRLA*, 36 c (1923), 266.

³⁶ Kelly, *Guide to Early Irish Law*, pp. 59–61.

into English as *dry*, ‘magician’.³⁷ A two-pronged argument, from later evidence within Ireland and England and also from earlier evidence for the continental Celts, suggests that druids were the professional order most likely to have caused difficulties to Christian missionaries.

The druids, then, should have been the main opponents and were undoubtedly the main victims of conversion. An early eighth-century lawtract on the responsibility for caring for the injured declares that the druid is to enjoy no privilege on account of any sacred status he may claim.³⁸ A pagan Ireland, in which the druids held a central position, was thus transformed into a Christian Ireland in which the Church had taken their central place. This set of changes was partly institutional – the introduction of the Church as a new and ideologically dominant learned order – and partly a matter of new ideas or of old ideas in a new form. The ideas by which conversion was accomplished can be summarised under two headings: first, the distinction between prophecy and spiritual power; secondly, the twin notions of the good pagan and the innocuous past.

We may begin with the distinction between prophecy and power. Adomnán’s *Life of Columba* is divided into three books. The first comprises miracles of prophecy, the second miracles of power (*uirtutes*), and the third Columba’s capacity to perceive angels. The source of this structural pattern is probably the *Life of St Benedict* in Gregory the Great’s *Dialogues*.³⁹ Indeed, an account of Columba’s prophetic power is lifted more or less word for word from Gregory on Benedict.⁴⁰ Yet, although the inspiration for the organisation of the *Life* appears to be this classic text of Latin hagiography, the structure is much more striking and explicit in Adomnán on Columba than in Gregory on Benedict. For Adomnán, Columba is the Benedict of the Irish, that is, the pre-eminent monastic saint of the Irish, just as, for Gregory, Benedict was pre-eminent among Italian monks. Yet there is, perhaps, more to Adomnán’s use of his threefold structure than this parallel between two monastic founders. A more detailed examination of the first two books

³⁷ The form of the borrowing suggests that the loan is from Irish *druí* rather than from its Welsh cognate *dryw*. ³⁸ *Bretha Crólige*, ed. Binchy, § 51.

³⁹ T. M. Charles-Edwards, ‘The New Edition of Adomnán’s *Life of Columba*’, *CMCS*, 26 (1993), p. 67.

⁴⁰ Adomnán, *VSC* i.1 (10b), 43; Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, ii.35 (and iv.8; ed. A. de Vogüé and P. Antin, Grégoire le Grand, *Dialogues*, 3 vols., SC 251, 260, 265, Paris, 1978–80, ii, p. 238; iii, p. 42); cf. G. Brünig, ‘Adamnans Vita Columbae und ihre Ableitungen’, *ZCP*, 11 (1917), 250; Sharpe, *Adomnán of Iona: Life of Columba*, n. 189.

of the Life of St Columba will enable us to trace connections between the image of Columba given by Adomnán and the pictures of the learned orders, present and past, given to us in texts of the eighth and ninth centuries. The parallel with St Benedict was perhaps particularly directed at Adomnán's external readership; the connections now to be examined would have been perceived by Irishmen.

That Irishmen might see Columba in a special way by virtue of his relationship to the learned orders is suggested by the *Amra Choluim Chille*, an obscure elegy on Columba composed shortly after his death in 597 by a poet (*fili*, 'seer') called Dallán Forgaill.⁴¹ In that poem Columba is presented as an eminent biblical scholar. This scholarship enables him to be called a *suí*, one who 'sees well'. *Suí* is part of the vocabulary of traditional learning, inherited from the Irish past, clustered around the metaphor of sight: the range of meaning given to its Welsh counterparts suggests that it had been applied to the ecclesiastical scholar or *sapiens* by the British missionaries to Ireland.⁴² If the *suí* is 'the good seer', the *fili* is likewise etymologically 'the seer'.⁴³ *Fili*, however, is the normal word for the trained and learned poet, one of whose grades of learning was itself called *suí*.⁴⁴

In early Irish narrative, this exceptional capacity to see is depicted as a power of prophecy: what the visionary sees is the future. At the beginning of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, Medb, queen of the Connachta and prime mover of the expedition against the Ulstermen, meets Fedelm *banfili*, 'woman-seer'.

'What is your name?' said Medb to the girl.

'Fedelm woman-seer of the Connachta is my name,' said the girl.

'Where are you coming from?' asked Medb.

'From Britain having learnt the craft of the *fili*,' said the girl.

'Do you have *imbas for-osna* [literally 'embracing knowledge/vision which illuminates']?' said Medb.

⁴¹ *Amra Choluim Chille*, ed. and tr. W. Stokes, 'The Bodleian Amra Choluimb Chille', *RC*, 20 (1899), 30–55, 132–83, 248–87, 400–37; the text and tr. in T. O. Clancy and G. Márkus, *Iona: The Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery* (Edinburgh, 1995), are based on the work of Stokes but omit the eleventh-century additional matter; Dallán Forgaill was a nickname: it means 'the blind man of superior testimony'.

⁴² Cf. the note to Welsh *syw(no)* and *sywyedyd* in *Canu Aneirin*, ed. I. Williams (Cardiff, 1937), line 212, Gaulish *Veleda*, etc.; J. E. Caerwyn Williams, 'The Court Poet in Medieval Ireland', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 57 (1971), 85–135; and also I Sam. 9:9, 18:19, a parallel pointed out by K. McCone, 'A Tale of Two Ditties: Poet and Satirist in *Cath Maíge Tuired*', in Ó Corráin *et al.* (eds.), *Sages, Saints and Storytellers*, p. 136.

⁴³ R. Thurneysen, *Die irische Helden- und Königsage bis zum 17. Jahrhundert* (Halle/Saale, 1921), p. 66.

⁴⁴ *Uraicecht na Ríar*, ed. Breatnach, p. 102 (§§ 1–2); for *suí* used for the highest grade of poet see *ibid.*, p. 22, BN 1, line 31; Thurneysen, *Die irische Helden- und Königsage*, p. 66.

‘I do indeed,’ said the girl.

‘Look for me, then, to see how my expedition will turn out.’

The girl then looked. Then Medb said:

‘Fedelm prophetess, how do you see the host?’

‘I see it bloody, I see it red.’⁴⁵

In this passage, Fedelm is both *banfili* ‘woman-seer’, and *banfáith* ‘prophetess’. The verbs throughout are of vision, of looking and of seeing. Her prophecy is achieved by seeing in the present what will happen in the future; and her capacity is called by Medb ‘the embracing vision which illuminates’.⁴⁶

With this in mind, we may consider Adomnán’s account of Columba’s prophetic powers, given in reply to one of his monks, Lugbe moccu Blái.

‘Tell me, I beg you, about your prophetic revelations such as this. How are they revealed to you? By sight or by hearing, or in some other way men know not?’

To which the saint replied:

‘You are asking me now about a very delicate subject. There are some people – few indeed – to whom the grace of God has given the power to see brightly and most clearly, with a mental grasp miraculously enlarged, at one and the same time as if lit by a single sunbeam, even the entire orbit of the whole earth and the sea and sky around it.’

This account by Columba of his prophetic power is given, it should be remembered, in words borrowed by Adomnán from Gregory the Great’s Life of St Benedict. Yet, even so, it is effectively a Christian account of *imbas for-osna*, ‘the embracing vision that illuminates’, no longer learned, as was Fedelm’s, from the teacher of *filidecht* but conferred by the grace of God. Although, therefore, Adomnán’s description was taken from the work of a pope and Roman aristocrat upon the outstanding Italian monk, it is likely to have had a particular resonance for him and for his native readers. This possibility is given more weight by the insistence of the *Amra Choluim Chille* on calling Columba a *suí*, ‘one who sees well’.

In Book 1 of his Life of Columba, Adomnán presents the saint as having the same capacity to foretell the course of battles as that attributed to Fedelm the prophetess in the saga. Yet he never makes a single

⁴⁵ *Táin Bó Cuailnge, Recension I*, ed. O’Rahilly, p. 2 (tr. p. 126).

⁴⁶ Cf. *Sanas Cormaic* (YBL version), ed. Meyer, Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts, ed. O. J. Bergin, R. I. Best, K. Meyer and J. G. O’Keeffe, 4 (Halle, 1912), no. 756; N. K. Chadwick, ‘Imbas for-osnai’, *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, 4 (1953), 97–135; P. Russell, ‘Notes on Words in Early Irish Glossaries’, *Études Celtiques*, 31 (1995), 198–200.

explicit reference to any native tradition of prophecy. The situation is different in Book II, devoted to miracles of power.⁴⁷ Three chapters of the book describe Columba's encounters with *magi* associated with the fortress of the Pictish king Bruide (Bridei) near Inverness.⁴⁸ In the first story we are told that Columba was preaching the gospel through an interpreter. A Pict heard him and was converted together with his household. A few days later, one of his sons was smitten with a dangerous illness from which he appeared to be dying. The pagan *magi* mocked the parents and claimed that their gods were being shown to be stronger than the Christian God. The boy died but Columba came to the parents, entered the building alone where the body lay, and prayed successfully that the boy be brought back to life. 'Mourning gave way to celebration and the God of the Christians was glorified.'⁴⁹ Having told this story, Adomnán then sets about drawing parallels, with the prophets Elijah and Elisha and with the apostles, Peter, Paul and John. Not every saint was given the grace of raising the dead to life, but it was granted to those prophets and apostles, and likewise to Columba. The *magi* were thus the devotees of pagan gods, in whose strength they boasted, set against the Christian God of Columba.

The next two chapters recount two confrontations with a particular *magus* called Broíchán. Broíchán was a man of especial influence, being the foster-father of the Pictish king. He had, however, an Irish slave-woman whom Columba wished to liberate. When Broíchán refused, Columba threatened him with death if he did not relent. He left Broíchán's house and travelled as far as the River Ness, where he testified to his companions that Broíchán had just been struck down and was close to death; moreover the king was sending two messengers to plead with Columba for the life of his foster-father. Columba sent back two of his own companions who were to declare that, if Broíchán freed the slave, he would live. She was freed and Broíchán survived. Subsequently, however, Broíchán decided to challenge the Christian holy man. Columba was intending to sail along Loch Ness on his way back home towards Iona. Broíchán announced that he would produce an adverse wind and would bring down a thick mist in order to prevent Columba from travelling. He made no idle boast: the adverse wind blew with vigour and the Highland mist was as murky as the pagan *magus* could have wished. Adomnán explains it as follows:⁵⁰

⁴⁷ The heading given to the book, however, specifies that these miracles, too, often included an element of prophecy (tr. Sharpe, *Adomnán*, p. 154): 'Now begins the second book, dealing with miracles of power, which are often also prophetically foreknown.'

⁴⁸ Adomnán, *VSC* ii.32-4.

⁴⁹ Tr. Sharpe, *Adomnán*, p. 180.

⁵⁰ Adomnán, *VSC* ii.34.

One must not be surprised that such things happen occasionally by the art of devils – when God permits it – so that the wind and waves can be stirred up to a storm. For in this way St Germanus was once attacked by legions of evil spirits as he sailed from the bay of Gaul to Britain in the cause of man's salvation.

Again, Adomnán appeals to an authoritative text, just as he did with Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*. This time it is the late fifth-century Life of St Germanus of Auxerre, ally of Pope Celestine and Bishop Palladius, written by Constantius of Lyons.⁵¹ Yet the explanation is more striking in Adomnán's text than in Constantius': the hagiography of Gaul revolves around the contest between the holy man and the demons, but the demonic is only very occasionally introduced into Irish Saints' Lives.⁵² It seems to be crucial for one particular purpose: not, as in Gaul, to reveal the divine power of the holy man, but to explain the power of the *magi*. So also, earlier in the text, a mere sorcerer, not aspiring to the high status of a *magus*, performs a miracle, real but also deceitful, by means of demonic power, only to have the deceit exposed and the results of his power reversed by Columba's appeal to God.⁵³

The *magi* confronted by Columba were Picts, though the lesser sorcerer appears to have been an Irishman. The pattern of the stories is, however, extremely close to those told by Muirchú and Tírechán about the *magi* who opposed St Patrick in the presence of Lóegaire, king of Tara.⁵⁴ In the Patrician texts the *magi* are clearly druids. The word *magus* is regularly rendered by *druí* in Irish;⁵⁵ moreover, these Irish *magi* or druids have the same power over mists and winds, the same fosterage relationships with royalty, and the same identification with paganism as did Broíchán and his fellow-Picts.⁵⁶ Adomnán, therefore, probably intended no distinction between the role of the Pictish *magus* and the Irish *magi* or druids. One function of Book II of Adomnán's Life of Columba is to contrast the divinely conferred power of the holy man and the demonic power of the pagan *magus*. The latter had real power; in a sense, the gods to whom a Broíchán appealed existed; only they were demons not gods. There were thus at least two approaches to pagan

⁵¹ Constantius, *Vita S. Germani*, c. 13 (ed. Borius, *Constance de Lyon: Vie de Saint Germain d'Auxerre*, pp. 144–8).

⁵² C. Stancliffe, 'The Miracle Stories in Seventh-Century Irish Saints' Lives', in J. Fontaine and J. N. Hillgarth (eds.), *Le septième siècle: changements et continuités* (London, 1992), pp. 105–9.

⁵³ Adomnán, *VSC* ii.17.

⁵⁴ Muirchú, *Vita S. Patricii*, i.13, 15; Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 8.

⁵⁵ For example, Muirchú, *Vita S. Patricii*, i.20, 'ille magus Lucetmail', is 'an druí Lucat Móel' in the Tripartite Life, *VT*² 540; Simon *magus* is *Simón druí*, *CGH* i.279.

⁵⁶ For example, mists: Muirchú, *Vita S. Patricii*, i.20.6 ('inuocatis demonibus'), and Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 19.2 (Tírechán declares, 19.3, 'Nescimus cuius potestatis hoc fuit'); fosterage: Tírechán, 19.1; paganism: *passim*, but e.g. Muirchú, *Vita S. Patricii*, i.15.

gods: idols were mere insentient objects possessing no power, but the gods of the pagans were also demons, of genuine though maleficent power, created by, and ultimately subject to the Christian God.⁵⁷

It is striking that, while Columba confronts *magi* in Book II, namely in the sphere of deeds of power, he has no such confrontation in Book I, on prophecy. Yet, as we have seen, prophecy played a central role in Irish conceptions of the *fili*, 'seer' or 'learned poet'. The same distinction between confrontation and acceptance is found in the Patrician texts, both those in the Book of Armagh and also the Patrician section of the vernacular lawtract, *Córus Béscnai*.⁵⁸ Moreover, this implies a clear redirection of some crucial scriptural analogues for such confrontations, for the opponents defeated by the prophet Elijah were themselves prophets, but prophets of Baal not of Yahweh;⁵⁹ similarly, those over whom the prophet Daniel triumphed at the courts of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar claimed the same powers as he did, only they did not possess 'the spirit of the holy gods'.⁶⁰ What is distinctive about the Irish narratives is the contrast between two forms of mysterious power, prophecy and the exercise of an occult power to change the physical world. The exercise of occult power is one thing; the acquisition of occult knowledge of the future another. In Muirchú and Tírechán, Patrick confronted and defeated the druids of King Lóegaire; but in Muirchú and in *Córus Béscnai* he was accepted by the chief *fili*, Dubthach maccu Lugair.⁶¹ Muirchú's version is as follows:

As he came into the banqueting hall of Tara, not one of them rose as he entered except one man only, that is, Dubthach maccu Lugair, a poet of the highest rank, who at that time had as pupil a junior poet called Fiacc, who was later an admirable bishop and whose relics are venerated in Sletty.

This action – not merely one of respect, but an acknowledgement of higher status – is central to the account of Patrick in *Córus Béscnai*.

⁵⁷ For pagan gods as idols see Patrick, *Confessio*, c. 41.

⁵⁸ *CIH* 527.20–1; 528.17–20; 529.1–5, as against 527.27–8; the text probably dates from the early eighth century. ⁵⁹ 1 Kings 18. ⁶⁰ Daniel 4:8.

⁶¹ Muirchú, *Vita S. Patricii*, i.19; cf. *CIH* 527–9. The essence of the story may have been in a Munster *cán* of c. 680, *Cáin Fuithirbe*. L. Breatnach, 'The Ecclesiastical Element in the Old-Irish Legal Tract *Cáin Fuithirbe*', *Peritia*, 5 (1986), 49–51. Dubthach also met with the approval of the author of *Bethu Brigte* (ed. Ó hAodha, c. 14); the same story is in the *Vita Prima S. Brigitae*, tr. Connolly, c. 16, but without the name of the suitor. Once established as the representative of a redeemable pagan order, ready for conversion and soon converted, Dubthach was set for a distinguished career: K. McCone, 'Dubthach maccu Lugair and a Matter of Life and Death in the Pseudo-Historical Prologue to the *Senchas Már*', *Peritia*, 5 (1986), 1–35; J. Carey, 'The Two Laws in Dubthach's Judgement', *CMCS*, 19 (1990), 1–18; idem, 'An Edition of the Pseudo-Historical Prologue to the *Senchas Már*', *Ériu*, 45 (1994), 1–32; D. Bracken, 'Immortality and Capital Punishment: Patristic Concepts in Irish Law', *Peritia*, 9 (1995), 167–86.

Dubthach maccu Lugair, having risen before Patrick and having accepted his God, went on to explain to Patrick the laws of the Irish. These laws were based on the law of nature – a concept for which the authority of St Paul's Epistle to the Romans could be invoked.⁶² Yet, though established on this sound foundation, they were in addition purified of any bad accretions by the friendly collaboration of Dubthach and Patrick. It could thus be claimed that the law of the Irish was traditional – indeed, inherited from the pagan past – and yet wholly consonant with the Christian present.

In one of the *Canones Hibernenses* the notion of 'natural goodness' is used to advance the proposition that, although native Irish law was believed to descend from the days of Irish paganism, it might nevertheless be maintained.⁶³ The story in Exodus telling how Moses' father-in-law Jethro told him not to judge all the cases of Israel himself but to appoint deputies was given a novel interpretation. Jethro was the priest of Midian, not one of the chosen people of Israel. Yet his *praecepta* 'commands' were accepted in 'the Law' although they were not commands of God, as were the Ten Commandments. And this was 'a judgement, that if we find judgements of the heathen good, which their good nature teaches them, and it is not displeasing to God, we shall keep them'.

The druid and his demonic power were to be utterly rejected; the seer, with his prophecy and his law, was to be given a permanent residence-permit in the new Christian Ireland. It was even suggested that the prophecy of the Irish seer flowed from the same source as the prophecy of the Jews, and that the ancient *fili* Athairne had prophesied Christ and had delivered himself of a Christian creed.⁶⁴ The law of the Irish was an expression, not just of the law of nature, but also of the teaching of those who prophesied Christ.

The likelihood is that the final settlement expressed in these texts involved far more readjustments to the Irish learned orders than they would have liked to admit. The distinction between prophecy and power is often much less clear than it is made to appear in the Patrician legend. There may even be a contrast between the standpoints of different churches: as we have seen, the legend of Patrick's triumph over the druids of King Lóegaire implies a much harsher view of the *magus* than

⁶² Romans 2:14–16; cf. *CIH* 240.21–4.

⁶³ *Hib.*, iii.8 (ed. and tr. Bieler, *Irish Penitentials*, pp. 168, 169). More generally, C. Donahue, 'Beowulf, Ireland and the Natural Good', *Traditio*, 7 (1949–51), 263–77; idem, 'Beowulf' and Christian Tradition: A Reconsideration from a Celtic Stance', *Traditio*, 21 (1965), 55–116.

⁶⁴ *CIH* 1115.3–22; cf. *ibid.*, 528.18–20; D. Ó Corráin, L. Breatnach and A. Breen, 'The Laws of the Irish', *Peritia*, 3 (1984), 420–2.

do some of the Old Testament texts. Not only Armagh but also Iona shared this view of the druid; Adomnán's use of *magus* for a Pictish magician is paralleled, as we have seen, by Old English *dry*, a loanword from Irish *drúí* probably introduced by Irish missionaries, very possibly from Iona. And yet the portrait of the *magus* or druid that emerges from the *Vita Prima* of Brigit and from the vernacular *Bethu Brigte* is far more favourable than those given by Muirchú or Adomnán.⁶⁵ In these Lives, *magi* not only perceive, by prophetic power, the true stature of Brigit but also welcome it. They seem to be representatives of an old order which is pagan, in some sense unclean,⁶⁶ and yet has the grace to prophesy the new Christian order. The rule of *magi* as prophets in this Life contradicts the terms of the settlement advocated by Adomnán, in which the *magi* were magicians rather than prophets.

One power ascribed to the druid by Caesar, namely that he could constrain others by his power of excommunication, has a weaker counterpart in the claim made by a Munster legal text that the poets or seers (*filid*) could coerce men by the law of honour: satire was now the weapon which might thrust a man out of power and influence. As we have seen, Mac Neill had the most attractive idea that the power of excommunication claimed by Caesar for the Gaulish druid might be the explanation why, in some legal texts, all the free were called *nemed*, 'sacred persons'.⁶⁷ Yet, in the Christian period, the poets do not appear to have controlled the *óenach*, the annual combination of legal assembly, occasion for political acts, party and horse-racing, even though the most famous *óenach* was held at Lughnasad, the feast of the god Lug who was the patron of the arts and the men of art.⁶⁸ Instead, the control of the *óenach* was a matter for the king and his people.⁶⁹ The best-attested example of excommunication from an *óenach* was deployed by the church of Tallaght in North Leinster:

The *óenach* of Tailtiu was prevented from being held on the Saturday, so that there arrived neither horse nor chariot with Áed son of Níall: that is, the community of Tamlachtae prevented it after the precinct of Tamlachtae had been insulted by the Uí Néill; and subsequently many gifts were given to the community of Tamlachtae.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ *Vita Prima S. Brigitae*, tr. Connolly, cc. 2, 8–10, 15; *Bethu Brigte*, ed. Ó hAodha, §§ 2–3, 5–6, 12.

⁶⁶ *Vita Prima*, c. 10.

⁶⁷ In *Uraicecht Becc* (CIH 1593.5–6), the *sóernemid* are *ecalsi*, *flatha*, *filid*, *feine*, 'churchmen, lords, poets, freemen'.

⁶⁸ CIH 471.23; M. Mac Neill, *The Feast of Lughnasa: A Study of the Survival of the Celtic Feast of the Beginning of Harvest*, Coimisiún Béaloideasa Éireann (London, 1962), pp. 311–38; D. A. Binchy, 'The Fair of Tailtiu and the Feast of Tara', *Ériu*, 18 (1958), 115.

⁶⁹ *Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchy, lines 502–5. ⁷⁰ AU 811.2.

Some functions formerly claimed by druids may have been reallocated to the Church, some to the *filid*. While the Church gained control of sacred ritual, the *filid* retained the long training ascribed by classical authors to the druids.⁷¹ Indeed, it is unclear whether the *filid* had always been a learned hierarchy entirely distinct from the druids, as they claimed to be by the late seventh century. In other words, although the seventh-century texts may claim, *via* the figure of Dubthach maccu Lugair, that, for the *filid*, there was a direct continuity between pagan past and Christian present, the reality probably involved much more change than they wished to admit.

The pagan past was at once a problem and an opportunity for Christian missionaries in Ireland. For all missionaries in Western Europe, indeed, and no doubt elsewhere, a major difficulty was the spiritual condition of dead ancestors. A classic example is a story told of the pagan Frisian king Radbod.⁷² He had been brought to the very point of baptism when one cleric at the back of the crowd was unwise enough to utter a triumphal whisper, audible in a moment of silence, 'At least he won't burn in Hell with his ancestors.' At which the king withdrew himself from the baptismal font, declaring that he would rather burn in Hell than live out all eternity in kinless solitude. What then was to be done about a past which, because it was peopled with kinsfolk, was a necessary part of everyone's identity? Conversion did not entail, for most people, a change in the location of burial. They continued to be buried in the graveyards used by their kindreds.⁷³ Monks were buried in their monastic graveyards, and kings were sometimes buried in the cemeteries of important churches, but otherwise the Christian Irish were as much attached to their kin in death as their ancestors had been.

One possible answer was the notion of the naturally good pagan.

When St Columba was staying for a few days on the island of Skye, he struck with his staff a patch of ground by the seashore in a particular place, and said to his companions: 'Strange to tell, my dear children, today, here in this place and on this patch of ground, an old man – a pagan but one who has spent his whole life in natural goodness – will receive baptism, and will die and be buried.'⁷⁴

⁷¹ Caesar, *De Bello Gallico*, vi.14.3; R. Thurneysen, 'Mittelirische Verslehren', in W. Stokes and E. Windisch (eds.), *Irische Texte*, 3 (Leipzig, 1891), pp. 32–65 (MV II, §§ 2–131); cf. BN VII in *Uraicecht na Ríar*, ed. Breatnach, pp. 42–3.

⁷² W. Levison, *England and the Continent in the Eighth Century* (Oxford, 1946), p. 56, on the *Vita Vulframni*, c. 9 (MGH SRM v. 668).

⁷³ *Hib.* xviii.2 (the *paternum sepulchrum*), whereas *monachi* should be buried in a church cemetery (*ibid.*, xviii.3); E. O'Brien, 'Pagan and Christian Burial in Ireland during the First Millennium AD', pp. 130–7. ⁷⁴ Adomnán, *VSC* i.33, tr. Sharpe, *Adomnán*, p. 136.

The old man, named Artbranan, accepted the Faith, was baptised and almost immediately died. Similarly, Patrick, in Muirchú's Life, comes across a man named Díchú who lived at Saul in Co. Down. He is described as 'by nature a good man, although a pagan.'⁷⁵ He is said by Muirchú to have been the first person baptised by Patrick in Ireland.

Both Artbranan and Díchú were baptised Christians before they died. Their pagan goodness thus served to explain their ready acceptance of Christianity rather than determining, on its own, their eternal fate. These stories do suggest, however, that one attitude to paganism was conciliatory, namely that it was possible to be an unbaptised pagan and yet retain natural goodness. If the attitude shown by Patrick and his fellow-missionaries in the fifth century was equally conciliatory, it would help to explain the survival of the seer in the new Christian Ireland, albeit in the form of a learned poet. On the other hand, it only made more acute the problem of what had happened after death to the naturally good in all the centuries before Palladius was sent to Ireland.

The evidence of texts from c. 700 can only indicate the end-results of conversion and so suggest the conclusion that the adoption of Christianity entailed a major restructuring of the learned orders. As we shall see shortly, there is reason to think that the notions of the good pagan and the gentile prophet – that is, the prophet among peoples other than the Jews – descended from the preoccupations of the fifth century, indeed, from the very circles from which Palladius, first bishop of the Irish, came. Before turning to Palladius, however, we need to consider another aspect of the pagan past as it appeared to the Christian Irish, namely its usefulness as an innocuous repository of failed divinities.

By c. 700 Irish scholars had already begun to develop that account of Irish prehistory that was to issue in the Middle Irish text, *The Book of the Taking of Ireland (Lebor Gabála Éirenn)*.⁷⁶ This account envisaged successive settlements of the island, the last one being that of the Irish, known as the Sons of Mil of Spain. These invasions were coordinated with the biblical chronology expounded in Jerome's translation of Eusebius' *Chronicle*. This scheme also underlay the early portions of the *Chronicle of Ireland* or *Irish World-Chronicle*, compiled about 911. Because it portrayed the history of the island as a series of land-takings by populations each of which replaced the one before, it had the effect of giving a single origin to the Irish people: the Irish were all the descendants of Mil. A

⁷⁵ Muirchú, *Vita S. Patricii*, i.11.4.

⁷⁶ An excellent brief survey is that by J. Carey, *The Irish National Origin-Legend: Synthetic Pseudohistory*, Quiggin Lecture (Cambridge, 1994).

grounding of Irish national identity in Judaeo-Christian history was, therefore, one function of Irish prehistory. A corollary, however, was that other peoples were relegated to the earlier stages of this prehistory of Ireland, before the Irish themselves migrated from Spain. The people that immediately preceded the Irish were the Irish pantheon, 'the divine people', or 'the peoples of the goddess Danu', *Túatha Dé Danann*.⁷⁷ This device of historical reconstruction, whereby the gods were relegated to a remote pre-Irish past, seems to be one reason why Irish literature presents, in this matter of the pagan gods, so startling a contrast with Anglo-Saxon literature. The poet of *Beowulf* can imagine pagan ship-burials and cremations. He can give imaginative coherence and power to his picture of a pre-Christian hero and king. What he does not do is to refer to, much less expatiate upon, the pagan gods, Woden, Thunor, Tiw and the rest. He does not introduce such divinities into his poem even though it is set in a pre-Christian Scandinavia. One explanation for his reticence may be that the gods were widely regarded as demons.

As we have seen, this is a view found in Adomnán's *Life of Columba*. Yet there was also another view, well presented by Daniel, bishop of Winchester, in a long letter to the West Saxon missionary to Germany, Boniface. He warns Boniface not to get entangled in arguments about the genealogies of the pagan gods. He should simply ask those ready to display their expertise in such matters whether their gods and goddesses were begotten; and since genealogies imply a fair amount of begetting, Boniface, having received the answer 'yes', could go on to ask whether there was a time, before they were begotten, when these gods and goddesses did not exist. He was finally to argue that, since they were creatures procreated in time, like men and women, they were nothing but men and women. While the 'demonic' strategy allows that the gods have suprahuman power in the present, it asserts that this power is evil; by contrast, what we may call the euhemerising strategy (gods are mere men) does not attribute any particular evil quality to the gods but it does deny that they have suprahuman power. In the Irish version of prehistory it also denies them any existence in the present. This euhemerising strategy was appropriate to the Irish gods. They were prone to begetting both other gods and heroes, such as Cú Chulainn, child of a human mother and the god Lug.⁷⁸ True, there were chronological difficulties in relegating the gods to a pre-Irish past. Not merely were such heroes as

⁷⁷ The second description seems to be a later development: J. Carey, "The Name "Tuatha Dé Danann"", *Éigse*, 18 (1981), 291-4.

⁷⁸ *Compt Con Culainn*, § 5 (ed. A. G. van Hamel, Dublin, 1933, p. 5).

Cú Chulainn of semi-divine parentage, but the same could be said even of an early seventh-century king of the Cruithni, a man whose historical reality seems unquestionable, Mongán mac Fíachnai.⁷⁹ His father was said to be Manannán mac Lir (Manannán son of the Sea), a god who is attested in Welsh as well as Irish texts.⁸⁰ I presume that this statement was a literary conceit; yet what is striking is that it was a possible literary conceit. Manannán was the victim of one of the most glaring examples of the euhemerising trick of turning a god into an inoffensive man. In a text preserved in Cormac's Glossary (c. 900), it is said that he was an outstanding pilot based on the Isle of Man (Manu, genitive Manann; hence Manannán). So good was he that men gave him divine honours.⁸¹

When we look at what Christian conversion had made of Irish paganism, we see a number of different strategies, not all consistent with one another, not all consistently applied, and therefore leaving many loose ends. What may be called the conciliatory approach gave as much value to the human past as possible, *via* the notions of the good pagan and the gentile prophet (who, for some, might even be a druid). As far as the gods were concerned, the conciliatory approach transplanted them from a dangerous present (where they would probably be treated as demons) into an innocuous past. It is worth remembering that the British missionaries in Ireland would have been familiar with a very similar array of gods and goddesses in their homeland; moreover, the latter were apparently given a treatment under the new Christian dispensation similar to that allowed to the Irish pantheon.⁸²

(III) PALLADIUS⁸³

Palladius, the first bishop of the Irish, came from an intellectual circle for which the ideas of the good pagan and the gentile prophet were of the highest concern. Pelagius – a Briton, though accused by Jerome of being stuffed with Irish porridge – developed ideas on the relationship between grace, human merit and salvation which he propounded

⁷⁹ His obit, AD 625, was in the Chronicle of Ireland; for the story of his conception see *Compert Mongáin*, ed. K. Meyer, *The Voyage of Bran to the Land of the Living* (London, 1895), pp. 42–3.

⁸⁰ See the entry on Manawydan fab Llŷr in R. Bromwich, *Trioedd Ynys Prydain* (Cardiff, 1961), pp. 441–3. ⁸¹ *Sanas Cormaic (YBL)*, ed. Meyer, p. 78, no. 896.

⁸² Not merely was the British author of the *Historia Brittonum* the author of the first surviving account of the successive invasions of Ireland, but British gods were admitted into literature in the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi*: Mac Cana, *Celtic Mythology*, pp. 75–83.

⁸³ The Irish form of his name may have been Collait: K. Mulchrone, 'The Old-Irish Form of Palladius', *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society*, 22 (1946), 34–42.

in aristocratic circles in Rome.⁸⁴ These ideas came to be attacked by the greatest Latin theologian of Antiquity, Augustine of Hippo. Augustine argued that human nature was radically corrupted by the Fall, so that any meritorious act presupposed the antecedent and undeserved grace of God working within the human soul.⁸⁵ The starting-point of salvation was not man but God, not the unaided strivings of the created towards the Creator but the unmerited friendship of God for his creature. The centres in which the Pelagian controversy raged were in the provinces around the Western Mediterranean. Britain, although probably sympathetic in a general way towards Pelagius, was remote from the main struggle until the Emperor Honorius decided to intervene.

On 30 April 418, the Emperor Honorius enacted a law by which anyone giving vent to Pelagian opinions was to be brought before the civil authorities and condemned to exile.⁸⁶ Yet this was ten years after Britain had rid itself of the authority of the Western Emperor in Ravenna.⁸⁷ The tactic employed by Augustine and his allies of appealing to secular authority against their theological opponents could, therefore, have no effect in Britain. Yet what was beyond the reach of imperial power was not beyond the authority of the pope. He could commission a Gallic bishop, Germanus of Auxerre, to rally the Britons to orthodoxy. Germanus himself, with his aristocratic birth and his background in government service, was in a position to appreciate the limitations of secular authority and the necessity of appealing to something different.⁸⁸ The events of 409–410 had brought about the final detachment of Britain from the prefecture of Gaul.⁸⁹ A man of Germanus' standing in Gaul was best placed to perceive that papal authority given to a Gallic bishop might prevail when the emperor could do nothing. Augustine and his allies had appealed both to the emperor and to the bishop of Rome. His Gallic supporters, confronted with British independence from the Empire, had only one central authority to which they could turn.

The Pelagian party in Britain in the 420s may have been created by imperial power and its limitations. The prevailing attitude in Britain has

⁸⁴ P. R. L. Brown, 'The Patrons of Pelagius: The Roman Aristocracy between East and West', *Journal of Theological Studies*, N.S., 21 (1970), 55–72, repr. in his *Religion and Society in the Age of Saint Augustine* (London, 1972), pp. 208–26. Jerome, *In Ieremiam Prophetam*, III, Pref. (ed. S. Reifer, CCL 74, Turnhout, 1970, p. 120). Cf. J. B. Bury, 'The Origins of Pelagius', *Hermathena*, 13 (1904–5), 26–35.

⁸⁵ Cf. P. R. L. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (London, 1967), pp. 368–75, 401–3.

⁸⁶ *PL* vi.492.

⁸⁷ E. A. Thompson, 'Zosimus 6. 10. 2 and the Letters of Honorius', *Classical Quarterly*, N.S., 32 (1982), 445–62.

⁸⁸ *PLRE* ii.504–5 (Germanus I); K. F. Stroheker, *Der senatorische Adel in spätantiken Gallien* (Tübingen, 1948), Prosopography, no. 178. ⁸⁹ Thompson, *Saint Germanus*, pp. 32–8.

aply been described as 'pre-Pelagian'.⁹⁰ In other words, current assumptions about human morality, about free will, and about grace were not founded upon any conscious rejection of Augustinian opinions, but they were such as to impel most cultured Christians to side more with Pelagius than with Augustine if the issue arose. Support for Pelagius was implicit and unformulated. The issue arose, however, in the 420s, probably because the law of 418 envisaged exile as the weapon to be used against the heretic. Prosper's *Contra Collatorem* implies that Germanus' opponents, 'the enemies of grace', had taken refuge in their native island:⁹¹ they were Britons but had, in the immediate past, been resident elsewhere, perhaps in Gaul or in Italy. The reason for their return to Britain may have been the law of 418, for, by crossing the Channel, they put themselves beyond the reach of imperial laws. If the emperor had decisively aided the Augustinian party in Gaul, he had perhaps created for the first time a consciously Pelagian party in Britain.

This, then, was the problem with whose solution the deacon Palladius was to concern himself. He first appears in the historical record in 429 as persuading Pope Celestine to give his authority to Germanus in order that the latter could rally the British Church against 'the enemies of grace', in particular a certain Agricola, the son of a Pelagian bishop, Severianus, and himself a Pelagian. The record in question is the Chronicle of Prosper of Aquitaine, the principal champion of Augustinian views in Gaul. In other words, these details were noted down by an annalist fully cognisant of the issues and himself involved in the controversy. Moreover, Prosper visited Rome in 431 and was to move to Rome in approximately 435 where he became a friend of the deacon Leo, to be elevated to the papacy in 440.⁹² Prosper, therefore, was peculiarly well placed to follow the activities of Palladius and Germanus from the standpoint of Rome.

According to Constantius' Life of Germanus, written about 480, the weapon used by the bishop of Auxerre when he won over the Britons and thus cornered the Pelagian party was the same as that envisaged by the law of 418 – namely exile.⁹³ The danger was, however, also the same

⁹⁰ R. A. Markus, 'Pelagianism: Britain and the Continent', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 37 (1986), 198–200. ⁹¹ *PL* li.271 (translated below).

⁹² S. Muhlberger, *The Fifth-Century Chroniclers: Prosper, Hydatius and the Gallic Chronicler of 452* (Liverpool, 1990), p. 52.

⁹³ Constantius, *Vita S. Germani*, c. 27, ed. Levison, MGH SRM vii.270; discussed by Thompson, *Saint Germanus*, pp. 28–30. I. N. Wood, 'The Fall of the Western Empire and the End of Roman Britain', *Britannia*, 18 (1987), 252, suggests that the context of Germanus' expedition to Britain and of Palladius' mission to Ireland was a re-establishment by Aetius of imperial power in much of Gaul c. 430, and that this may have given rise to a party hoping for the restoration of imperial authority in Britain. Germanus, however, would still need to rely on local power to expel any Pelagians.

as with the law of 418, that the penalty would only displace the disease, not cure it.

In the context either of a visit to Britain before 429 or of Germanus's visit, a group of Irish Christians must have signified *via* their British contacts a willingness to receive a bishop. In one of his letters Pope Celestine lays it down as a rule that no bishop is to be sent to a community unwilling to receive him.⁹⁴ The implication of this is that contacts with Irish Christians had preceded the next known event in Palladius's career: 'Palladius, having been ordained by Pope Celestine, is sent, as their first bishop, to the Irish who believe in Christ.'⁹⁵ The connection between Palladius' interest in the Pelagian controversy and his interest in the Irish Christians is suggested by the phrasing of another reference by Prosper to the mission:

He [Celestine] has been, however, no less energetic in freeing the British provinces from this same disease [the Pelagian heresy]: he removed from that hiding-place certain enemies of grace who had occupied the land of their origin; also, having ordained a bishop for the Irish, while he labours to keep the Roman island catholic, he has also made the barbarian island Christian.⁹⁶

One reason why Palladius was ordained by Celestine as bishop for the Irish who believed in Christ may have been a concern that Germanus' success in securing the exiling of the leading Pelagians would lead them to take refuge in Ireland. His task was partly, perhaps, to safeguard the orthodoxy of existing Irish Christians, partly, in the words of Prosper's *Contra Collatorem*, 'to make the barbarian island Christian'. The three concerns present within the group of men concerned with the sending of Palladius were, therefore, the activities of a Pelagian party in Britain, and perhaps potentially in Ireland; the desire of Irish Christians for a bishop; and the requirement to provide the leadership to the Christian community of Ireland which would set it on the road to making 'the barbarian island Christian'. None of these concerns is inconsistent with any of the others, although scholars have sometimes argued as if they were.⁹⁷ The use of papal authority secured for Germanus' mission by Palladius was no doubt the occasion which encouraged Palladius to obtain papal authority for his Irish mission. On the other hand, there were much deeper reasons which, on the papal side, encouraged Celestine to give his full blessing to this initiative.

⁹⁴ Celestine, *Ep.* iv, *PL* 50, col. 434: 'Nullus invitis detur episcopus. Cleri, plebis et ordinis consensus ac desiderium requirantur.' Thompson, *Who Was Saint Patrick?*, p. 61.

⁹⁵ Prosper, *Chronicle*, s.a. 431; Ed. Th. Mommsen, *Chronica Minora saec. IV. V. VI. VII.*, 3 vols., MGH AA 9 (Berlin, 1892), i.473.

⁹⁶ Prosper, *Contra Collatorem*, c. 21; *PL* li.271.

⁹⁷ Thompson, *Who Was Saint Patrick?*, p. 64.

In a sermon preached to his Roman flock in 441, on the feastday of the apostles Peter and Paul, the two columns of the Roman Church, Leo the Great proudly proclaimed that the authority of Christian Rome had surpassed the farthest boundaries limiting the power of imperial Rome. Moreover, the comparison was not with the contemporary authority of the Western Empire, but with imperial Rome at her apogee:

These men [Peter and Paul, as opposed to the fratricide Romulus and his victim Remus] are the ones who promoted you [Rome] to such glory that, as a holy race, a chosen people, a priestly and a royal city, and having been made the head of the whole world through the holy see of the blessed Peter, you came to rule over a wider territory through the worship of God than [you could have] by earthly domination. For although you were exalted by many victories and thereby extended the authority of your empire by land and by sea, nevertheless what the toils of war subjected to you is less than that which a Christian peace has made obedient.⁹⁸

The claim was appropriate to the feastday, for Rome was the resting place of Paul, apostle to the Gentiles, as well as Peter, chief of the apostles and pre-eminent pastor of the sheep of Christ. Who then were these new subjects of Christian Rome living beyond the bounds of the Empire? And was there any reason, apart from the honour due to the apostles Peter and Paul and to their city, Rome, why Leo should have concerned himself with such distant missionary successes?⁹⁹

The Goths across the lower Danube had already been converted in the fourth century, but this had been by a combination of the native Goth, Ulfila, Eusebius of Nicomedia, a bishop favoured by the emperor, and imperial support. The Goths, however, were Arian heretics. Yet this link between imperial diplomacy, the leading court-bishop, and the consecration of a bishop for the barbarians finds an echo, of crucial importance for Leo the Great, in Canon 28 of the Council of Chalcedon.¹⁰⁰ There the patriarchal status of the bishop of Constantinople is explicitly associated with a claim to consecrate bishops to work among barbarians in certain imperial dioceses, notably Thrace.¹⁰¹ New Rome, like Old Rome, was to have the authority to intervene beyond its own metropolitan province in order to promote the preaching of the Gospel among bar-

⁹⁸ *Tractatus*, no. 82.1 (ed. Chavasse, *Sancti Leonis Magni Romani Pontificis Tractatus*, CCL 88, 88A, pp. 508–9). Cf. *Epistolae*, x.1 (*PL* liv:628–9). On Romulus as a fratricide, compare Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, xv.5.

⁹⁹ P. A. McShane, *La Romanitas et le pape Léon le Grand. L'apport culturel des institutions impériales à la formation des institutions ecclésiastiques* (Tournai, 1979), pp. 86–91, 97–107.

¹⁰⁰ *The Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. N. P. Tanner, 2 vols. (London, 1990), pp. 99–100.

¹⁰¹ Cf. E. Herman, 'Chalkedon und die Angestaltung des konstantinopolitanischen Primats', in A. Grillmeier and A. Bacht (eds.), *Das Konzil von Chalkedon*, 3 vols. (Würzburg, 1951–4), ii.474.

barian pagans. The phrasing of the relevant passage in the proceedings of the Council suggests that settlements south of the Danube in the heyday of Attila's Hunnic empire may have been the principal subject of concern. In the early 450s any matter affecting relations with Attila was of critical importance for the Emperor Marcian; the opportunity of developing that close collaboration with the Patriarch Flavian which had been a mark of the Council must have been attractive. The bishop of Constantinople, therefore, had to have the authority to intervene far to the north; the source claimed for such an authority was his status as the bishop of New Rome, enjoying an authority derived from, and inferior only to, that of Old Rome. Yet Leo and his representatives at the Council would have none of such arguments. For the pope, Alexandria was the patriarchate second in rank to Rome, and its privileges were not to be abrogated. So began the long quarrel over the 'ecumenical' patriarchate which troubled several subsequent popes, among them Gregory the Great in the very years when he dispatched the mission to the English. In the 450s, therefore, missionary activity among the barbarians, and especially the right to consecrate a bishop to care for barbarian Christians, was a matter of concern in the highest circles of Christendom. Ulfila's mission, sponsored by a bishop of Constantinople, succeeded only in creating a nation of Arian heretics who subsequently sacked Rome.¹⁰² If Leo thought of the Goths when he was preaching in honour of the apostles Peter and Paul, it was as an example to illustrate not his proud claim but rather its false shadow in Constantinople.

At the time when he was considering what arguments to address to the warring theological parties in the East, Prosper of Aquitaine was his friend and possibly his adviser.¹⁰³ Prosper, however, was the author of three works which bear upon the theme of missionary work beyond the frontiers of the Empire: 'On the calling of all nations' (*De Uocatione Omnium Gentium*), *Contra Collatorem*, and his continuation of the Chronicle of Eusebius.¹⁰⁴

The *De Uocatione Omnium Gentium* was probably composed in Rome in the 440s, and thus within the circle of Leo and within a very few years

¹⁰² Cf. Leo, *Tractatus*, no. 84, on the anniversary of Alaric's sack of, and withdrawal from, Rome.

¹⁰³ Gennadius, *De Viris Illustribus*, c. 85, ed. E. Richardson, *Texte und Untersuchungen*, xiv.1 (Leipzig, 1896), p. 90 (the term *consiliarius* is only in one MS, but McShane argues that it seems to represent the situation in the period running up to the Council of Chalcedon: *La Romanitas*, pp. 370–1). This is doubted by R. A. Markus, 'Chronicle and Theology: Prosper of Aquitaine', in C. Holdsworth and T. P. Wiseman (eds.), *The Inheritance of Historiography 350–900* (Exeter, 1986), pp. 34–6 (31–43); he is, however, content to see Prosper as Leo's friend.

¹⁰⁴ The authenticity of *De Uocatione* was convincingly defended by M. Cappuyns, 'L'auteur du "De uocatione omnium gentium"', *Revue bénédictine*, 39 (1927), pp. 198–226, and by R. Lorenz, 'Das Augustinismus Prosper's von Aquitanien', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, 73 (1962), p. 233, n. 129.

of the Council of Chalcedon.¹⁰⁵ It was designed to counter arguments against Augustine's position on grace, but in a more eirenic manner than Prosper had adopted in *Contra Collatorem* written c. 434. One of the issues addressed was a possible Pelagian argument for the goodness of non-Christians:

It may be that, just as we know that the gentile peoples were not, at one time, adopted into the fellowship of the sons of God, so also now, in the furthest regions of the world, there are some nations whom the grace of the Saviour has not yet illuminated. Nevertheless we do not doubt that, for them also, a time for their calling has been appointed by the hidden judgement of God; at that time they will hear and will accept the Gospel, which they have not heard hitherto.¹⁰⁶

If saving grace came to men through Christ, and if a primary and necessary consequence of grace was belief in Christ, good men before the Incarnation could not have been given saving grace.¹⁰⁷ The same argument applied to those beyond the reach of the Christian missionary. Men who had never heard even the name of Christ could not believe in him. If, then, faith in Christ was a necessary consequence of grace, such a person was denied salvation by an accident, the time or the place of his birth. So, it could be argued, an Augustinian position on grace must imply that most of the human race was beyond even the possibility of salvation. But it was the will of God that all men be saved (I Tim. 2:3–4, accepted wholeheartedly by Prosper in the *De Uocatione*); hence the Augustinian view of grace and salvation must be false. In its place one could uphold a rival view, that just as Melchisedech and Job were not of the chosen people of Israel, and yet were pleasing to God, so too in the New Covenant in Christ's blood there might be those beyond the bounds of the Church, ignorant of Christ, who were nevertheless worthy of Paradise. Pelagius confronts the problem posed by their relationship to Christ, but in place of a solution he offers a rhetorical flourish: Job was 'a man of the Gospel before the Gospel was known, a man of the apostles before their commands were uttered.'¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ On the date see T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'Palladius, Prosper and Leo the Great', in D. Dumville et al., *Saint Patrick, AD 493–1993*, p. 3 n. 11.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. the argument put by Germanus in Cassian's *Conlatio* xiii, *De Protectione Dei*, c. 4 (ed. M. Petschenig, *Iohannis Cassiani Conlationes, XXIII*, CSEL 13, Vienna, 1886, p. 365) with Prosper, *De Uocatione Omnium Gentium*, ii.17.

¹⁰⁷ For some later repercussions of this problem see H. Rondet, *Le péché originel dans la tradition patristique et théologique* (Paris, 1967), pp. 208–17, and A. Michel, 'Sacraments préchrétiens', *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, xiv, cols. 644–55.

¹⁰⁸ Pelagius, *Ad Demetriadem*, v. 2 (Melchisedech), vi.3 (Job), *PL* xxx.20–1, or *PL* xxxiii. 1102, 1103; tr. B. R. Rees, *The Letters of Pelagius* (Woodbridge, 1991), pp. 40, 43. So Prosper, *De Uocatione*, ii.5 (*PL* li.691) admits that before Christ some non-Jews were saved just as, after Christ, some Jews are still saved (ii.9, *ibid.*, li.694).

For both parties the good pagan was a difficulty. Both had to uphold the doctrine that the passion and resurrection of Christ were instrumental in the salvation of the human race. Yet how could that be if most of human history lay in the long centuries before the Incarnation, and even afterwards whole nations lay beyond the reach of the Church? Augustine appealed to prophecy: the Old Testament prophet has faith in the Christ whom he foresees by the power of supernatural grace.¹⁰⁹ Grace, therefore, could confer faith – in Christ, not just in God – before the Incarnation. Augustine was also prepared to argue, however, that prophecy, even among the Jews, could be unconscious and, before the beginnings of the Jewish people, could be ‘by signs and symbols appropriate to the times’.¹¹⁰ The role of prophecy is thus expanded to include the Mosaic law, the rites, the sacred calendar, the priestly organisation, and even the equipment of the Temple – ‘all these were symbols and predictions that found their fulfilment in Christ’. This argument explained how the Old Testament Jews could be saved, but it removed the distinction between prophecy and typology, between words which pointed to Christ and events, people or things which prefigured him: everything that pointed to Christ, consciously or unconsciously, was prophecy. In the Old Testament, we may conclude, faith in Christ may be unconscious, not only in the prophet (or type) but in those who hear the prophet (or are aware of the type). Not only Job may be saved but even his companions.

Pelagius’ reaction was different. Prophecy is not necessary, and the type of Christ is not the same as the prophet. Job prefigured Christ through his virtuous life: he confessed a living God in the midst of his sufferings rather than prophesying a future Christ. Yet if the Pelagian upheld the claims of natural goodness, he loosened the link between Christ and human salvation. No longer would the Cross be the necessary condition of redemption from sin and eternal happiness. The controversy thus made the pagan nations beyond the Empire into a pressing problem, alongside unbaptised infants and the Gentiles of the Old Testament, such as Job. To judge by the opinions generally held in the late seventh century, these issues of the good pagan (or gentile) and prophecy of Christ came to be of direct concern to churchmen within Ireland. What seems to have happened is that the Irish adopted both the good pagan of Pelagius and the prophet of Augustine. They were not

¹⁰⁹ Augustine, *De Ciuitate Dei*, ed. B. Dombart and A. Kalb, CCSL 47, 48 (Turnhout, 1855), xviii. 47; *De peccatorum meritis et remissione*, ed. C. F. Vrba and J. Zycha, CSEL 60 (Vienna, 1913), ii.11; *De Perfectione Iustitiae Hominis*, ed. C. F. Vrba and J. Zycha, CSEL 42 (Vienna, 1902), xix.

¹¹⁰ *De Ciuitate Dei*, vii.32.

concerned to make the Old-Testament type of Christ (Job or Melchisedech) into a prophet; but Augustine's prophets, translated to Ireland, were crucial in rescuing the native pre-Christian past from a wholesale condemnation to the fires of Hell.

Prosper's *De Uocatione Omnium Gentium* shows evidence of careful thought both theoretical and practical. In this connection we may consider a phenomenon illustrated by a central event in Patrick's career, the taking of Roman provincials into slavery beyond the frontier. Patrick was not just concerned with slave-raids in his own case where Irishmen were responsible; in the letter to Coroticus and his soldiers he shows a passionate concern for Irish men and women captured by raiders, as well as knowledge of Gallo-Roman efforts to ransom Christian captives taken by the Franks.¹¹¹ Prosper, however, sees in these Christian slaves the unconscious instruments of divine grace. The Christian Roman taken by the pagan barbarian often converts his master to Christianity:

Some sons of the church who have been captured by enemies have handed their masters into the possession of Christ's Gospel; and by virtue of teaching the faith they have had charge of those whom they were serving as slaves taken in war.¹¹²

Even barbarians raiding within Roman territory may learn of Christianity 'in our lands' and so take the faith back with them to their homes beyond the frontier.¹¹³ This perception that the weakness of imperial Rome could help to spread Christianity might have been a comment on the career of Patrick, if only one had any reason to believe that Prosper had heard of the *papa* of the Irish. In Britain, as on the Rhine, a weaker frontier was a more porous frontier: it was easier for ideas to travel out of the Empire as well as for invaders to come in.

In the long term the Irish Church was to follow its British counterpart in refusing, or not perceiving the need, to anathematise Pelagius, although in the short term there was an active anti-Pelagian party in Britain able to request Germanus to come to its aid.¹¹⁴ This small network of anti-Pelagians linking Rome, Gaul and Britain was instrumental in setting the mission to Ireland on a formal footing. Prosper, with his links to Celestine and especially Leo the Great, and probably also to Germanus of Auxerre, was a central figure in this network. He is also the person who, in two other works, his *Chronicle* and *Contra Collatorem*,

¹¹¹ *Epistola ad Milites Corotici*, c. 14.

¹¹² *De Uocatione Omnium Gentium*, ii.33 (PL li.717–18).

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ D. N. Dumville, 'Late-Seventh- or Eighth-Century Evidence for the British Transmission of Pelagius', *CMCS*, 10 (1985), 39–52 (with extensive bibliography on pp. 39–40).

has provided us with the evidence for the mission of Palladius to the Irish. *De Uocatione Omnium Gentium* is, however, a key text if one wishes to understand the reasons for Palladius' mission.

In the 430s and 440s the mission of Palladius was the most immediate example of this mission to all peoples through which the divine 'calling of all nations' (*uocatio omnium gentium*) could be realised. It was also a dramatic instance, well known to both Leo and Prosper, both of whom were in Rome in the 430s, of the role of the see of Rome in preaching the gospel to the barbarians. The apostles preaching to Parthians and Medes at Pentecost would serve as the starting-point of Prosper's argument in the *De Uocatione*, but he concludes by declaring that by the *principatus* of the apostolic see the authority of Rome has been extended farther than it had been by force of arms. For Leo's argument, Rome was the starting-point and this conclusion, and therefore the mission to the Irish was crucial: Celestine had ordained and sent Palladius. Admittedly he did not cite the mission openly in his sermon: a Roman audience might be expected to take more interest in an eloquent statement of its enhanced authority under the Christian dispensation than in any details about the Irish, that people sodden in porridge.¹¹⁵ The Irish mattered to Leo rather than to the Romans.

They also mattered, however, to his adviser, Prosper. He might start from a different point and seek to exalt divine grace more than the city of Rome, but the links between the *De Uocatione* and Leo's sermon are sufficiently close to make it clear that they are different applications of a single idea, namely that the Christian Gospel had surpassed the Roman Empire in territorial extent. This idea was under development by Leo and his advisers from early in his pontificate, as can be shown by putting the different versions of the sermon and Prosper's work side by side.¹¹⁶

From this period of intense discussion in the 440s we may then turn to Prosper's earlier works, *Contra Collatorem* of c. 434 and the Chronicle, the first version of which may be assigned to much the same period. At this point (§ 21) in *Contra Collatorem*, Prosper is praising the initiatives taken by Celestine in defence of the doctrine of grace and against the Pelagian heresy. The conclusion of his argument is that the authority of Rome has spoken decisively against Pelagius and his disciples. Celestine's energy in defence of the Faith was demonstrated, for Prosper, by his having rescued Britain from heresy and Ireland from paganism. In his Chronicle he says that in 429 Celestine sent Germanus *uice sua*, as

¹¹⁵ Jerome, *In Ieremiam Prophetam*, III, Pref.

¹¹⁶ Charles-Edwards, 'Palladius, Prosper and Leo the Great', 6.

his representative, to rid Britain of Pelagianism, and in 431 he sent Palladius as bishop for the Irish who believed in Christ. At this period, c. 430, we are close to Prosper's first visit to Rome, where the archdeacon Leo was already in a position of influence, not confined to the city, as is shown by his friendship with Cassian.¹¹⁷

There is a link between Germanus's expedition to Britain and Palladius' to Ireland which goes beyond the probability that the latter was Germanus' deacon and was sent by him to Rome to gain papal authority for the visit to Britain.¹¹⁸ The words of Prosper – 'while he labours to keep the Roman island Catholic, he has also made the barbarian island Christian' – written only two or three years after Palladius was sent to Ireland, already opposed Roman empire and barbarian Christianity in a manner which anticipated Leo's Sermon 82. Yet they represented aspiration rather than achievement, continued hopes for Palladius' mission entertained in Rome and in Gaul rather than congratulations addressed to a pope whose emissary has completed his task. Palladius could not conceivably have converted the whole island in the three years since 431; what the text shows (contrary to the views of some commentators)¹¹⁹ is that the papacy envisaged the conversion of all the Irish: not just pastoral care for a few Irish Christians or for British slaves living in Ireland, but a full-scale mission to the entire island.

Irish texts concerning St Patrick, from the late seventh century, were concerned to extract what they could from the notice of Palladius in Prosper's Chronicle, but to pass over in silence or to minimise the achievements of this bishop of the Irish Christians. It is tempting to follow them in so far as Palladius may be supposed to have disappeared from the concerns of popes and Gallic bishops once he had crossed the Irish Sea. At the theoretical level, at least, the evidence of Prosper's *De Uocatione Omnium Gentium* and of Leo's Sermon 82 shows that this is wholly untrue. For twenty years, at least, Palladius' mission remained a matter of deep concern for both Leo and Prosper. Moreover, the consecration by the pope of a bishop for the Irish was directly relevant to Canon 28 of the Council of Chalcedon and thus to papal relations with both the Eastern emperor and the bishop of Constantinople. One of the main impulses behind the theoretical elaboration of the papal primacy from Damasus to Gelasius was fear of imperial domination.¹²⁰ Imperial

¹¹⁷ O. Chadwick, *John Cassian*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 141–2.

¹¹⁸ Whether Palladius belonged to the Palladii associated with Bourges (*PLRE* ii.821: Palladii 14) is uncertain. ¹¹⁹ Thompson, *Who Was Saint Patrick?*, p. 64.

¹²⁰ McShane, *La Romanitas*, p. 112.

laws had indeed conferred major powers upon the bishop of Rome by which he might intervene in other provinces,¹²¹ but that only made it the more important to base the papal primacy on something other than imperial decrees. Otherwise the bishop of Rome would become merely an imperial official. The activities of Germanus and of Palladius, in Britain and in Ireland, demonstrated that a Christian and papal Rome, the Rome of Peter and Paul, could intervene to safeguard and to spread the Faith in an island which had thrown off imperial authority and also in another island which had never been subject to the sway of the emperor. The Christian faith and the authority of Christian Rome extended not only to Roman citizens, not just to Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, but to rebellious Britons and even to the barbarian Irish.

There is no reason to believe that Leo the Great's interest in Britain and Ireland was merely theoretical. The second mission of Germanus to Britain, which E. A. Thompson would date to 437 (or possibly 436) but others to the 440s and therefore within Leo's pontificate, is further evidence that the concerns of 429–31 remained pressing, in spite of a slackening of the Pelagian controversy in Gaul.¹²² One cannot argue, from the silence of Patrick's *Confessio* and *Epistola ad Coroticum* about Palladius, that the latter's mission had been cut short.¹²³ It remains exceedingly likely that the lack of later evidence about Palladius, other than passages seeking to remove him from the scene before Patrick's arrival, is due simply to Patrician hagiographers' skill in transferring elements from the career of Palladius to that of Patrick.¹²⁴ Columbanus' reference, in his letter to Pope Boniface, to Irish preservation of 'the catholic faith as it was transmitted to us first of all by you, the successors of the holy apostles' is reasonably taken as a reference to the mission of Palladius.¹²⁵ When Columbanus left Ireland for Gaul in c. 590 much more may have been remembered about the first bishop of the Irish than has come down to us.

In the last years of Leo's pontificate it was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain lines of communication between Rome, southern

¹²¹ Notably by Gratian, in 378–9, *Epistulae Imperatorum, Pontificum, Aliorum inde ab a. CCCLXVII usque ad DLIII datae: Avellana quae dicitur Collectio*, ed. O. Günther, CSEL 35 (Vienna, 1895), pp. 57–8.

¹²² Thompson, *Saint Germanus of Auxerre*, pp. 55–70. Ian Wood, 'The End of Roman Britain', in Lapidge and Dumville (eds.), *Gildas: New Approaches*, p. 16, suggests c. 435 although a date c. 440 is possible. In favour of a later date is R. W. Mathisen, 'The Last Year of Saint Germanus of Auxerre', *AB*, 99 (1981), 151–9.

¹²³ Binchy, 'Patrick and his Biographers', 144–8.

¹²⁴ J. H. Todd, *St Patrick: Apostle of Ireland: A Memoir of his Life and Mission* (Dublin, 1864), p. 303; Binchy, 'Patrick and his Biographers', 27–31, 142–4.

¹²⁵ *Eph.*, v.3 (ed. Walker, *Sancti Columbani Opera*, p. 38). Cf. Binchy, 'Patrick and his Biographers', pp. 12, 169.

Gaul and the British Isles. The Gallic Chronicler of AD 452 does not reveal triumphs of bishops against Pelagians or missions to the Irish, in part perhaps because his theological sympathies ran counter to those of Prosper.¹²⁶ What he does record is the subjection of the Britons to Saxon power.¹²⁷ The appeal of the Britons to Actius confirms the approximate accuracy of the Chronicle's entry in so far as it shows the Britons in grave difficulties, although Gildas himself sets the letter in the context of Irish and Pictish, not Saxon, attacks.¹²⁸ A Britain and Ireland under the benign authority of papal Rome, in which Leo had delighted in 441, was only a brief interval between the end of imperial authority and the devastating expansion of Saxon power in the 440s. Prosper's hopes of barbarian inroads leading to barbarian conversion were borne out in the long run; but the next dramatic advance in western Europe, the conversion of Clovis, saw a Frankish king concerned to advance his relations with the Emperor Anastasius more than with the pope.

(III) PATRICK

To judge by the two primary witnesses, Prosper for Palladius and Patrick for himself, the two principal known missionaries to the Irish belonged to separate phases of the conversion. The most secure information about Palladius is that he was the first bishop resident in Ireland.¹²⁹ His church was thus the first fully fledged Irish church. Patrick's claim,

¹²⁶ Wood, 'The Fall of the Western Roman Empire and the End of Roman Britain', 255; idem, 'Continuity or Calamity? The Constraints of Literary Models', in J. Drinkwater and H. Elton (eds.), *Fifth-Century Gaul: A Crisis of Identity?* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 14–15.

¹²⁷ *Chronica Minora*, ed. Mommsen, i.660. See Ian Wood's helpful discussion, 'The End of Roman Britain', pp. 17–20.

¹²⁸ Gildas, *De Excidio Britanniae*, c. 20 (ed. Winterbottom, *Gildas*, p. 95). On the difficulties of reconciling the evidence of the Chronicle of 452 with Gildas' use of the letter, see Wood, 'The End of Roman Britain', p. 20, and P. Sims-Williams, 'The Settlement of England in Bede and the *Chronicle*', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 12 (1983), pp. 7–15.

¹²⁹ M. Esposito, 'The Patrician Problem and a Possible Solution', *Irish Historical Studies*, 10 (1956–7), 131–55, followed recently by J. Koch, 'Cothairche, Esposito's Theory, and Neo-Celtic Lenition', in A. Bammesberger and A. Wollmann (eds.), *Britain 400–900: Language and History*, *Anglistische Forschungen*, 205 (Heidelberg, 1990), 179–202, argued that Patrick preceded Palladius. While it is certainly true, as Koch points out, that this would make the chronology of the development of Irish much easier, there are no good historical arguments for this interpretation: it requires one to believe, not just that Prosper was wrong when he wrote that Palladius was the first bishop to be sent to the Irish (it is fairly clear that Patrick was sent by British ecclesiastical authorities), but also that a missionary whose proudest claim was to have taken the Faith to the furthest limits of the island was earlier than one believed in Rome to have been the first bishop sent to a nascent Christian community. Finally, it is not clear that Patrick does not refer to any predecessors in his *Confessio*; he may have done so in c. 34.

however, on which he insists, is that he was the first to take Christianity 'even to remote parts, where no one lived any further'.¹³⁰

It has been claimed that when Patrick refers to preaching as far as the remotest lands, he means simply Ireland, since for anyone from the Roman Empire Ireland was indeed remote.¹³¹ This interpretation is understandable but unsustainable. In the passages quoted from the Bible, the reference is indeed to lands remote from the Eastern Mediterranean. Ireland – any part of Ireland – would, by such standards, be remote. But in the moving passage in which he declares that he has struggled through many dangers and difficulties to preach the Gospel 'even to remote parts, where no one lived any further', Patrick is addressing fellow-inhabitants of Ireland.¹³² For them the Wood of Voclut beside the Western Sea, from which Patrick imagined the voices of the Irish asking him to 'come and walk further among us', would indeed qualify as such a remote place.¹³³ Patrick's claim for his own significance would have had little weight if he had merely worked in Co. Wicklow or Co. Down. The whole point of his words is that, as Christ's own apostles had begun to extend the Christian Faith beyond Palestine, so he, in a westward direction, had completed that movement. He, a successor of the apostles, had taken the Faith to the uttermost western limits of the inhabited world beyond which no man lived; and the further significance of that achievement was encapsulated in the text from Matthew 24:14, quoted by Patrick himself:¹³⁴ 'And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.' So far as the West was concerned that apocalyptic moment had now been reached – in the work of Patrick.

The most important text for Patrick was the one from Matthew just quoted. It is cited in chapter 34 of the *Confessio* together with a phrase from Acts, 2:17, taken from the first sermon preached by St Peter on the day of Pentecost. The beginning and the culmination of the Church's mission are thus brought together; its beginning in Jerusalem to an audience drawn from Parthians, Medes and others, and its culmination when

¹³⁰ *Confessio*, c. 51.

¹³¹ E. A. Thompson, *Who Was Saint Patrick?*, pp. 80, 87–8.

¹³² *Confessio*, c. 51.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, c. 23. The *silva Vocluti* was known to Tirechán, a native of the district: see his *Collectanea*, 14.3; 42.7; also *VT*² 1509; on the MS forms of the name see R. Thurneysen, 'Silva Focluti', *ZCP*, 19 (1931), 191–2; further, E. Mac Neill, 'Silva Focluti', *PRIA*, 36 c (1923), 249–55 (in favour of a site in Ulster); L. Bieler, 'The Problem of *Silva Focluti*', *Irish Historical Studies*, 3 (1943), 351–64 (the fullest account of the manuscript evidence, with a full bibliography of earlier discussions).

¹³⁴ *Confessio*, c. 40.

the mission reached all peoples. Patrick also deployed a whole string of texts in chapters 38–40, notably a passage from a sermon preached by Paul and Barnabas in Antioch of Pisidia: ‘For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.’¹³⁵ For Patrick one ‘end of the earth’ was Co. Mayo. He was strengthened in this belief by a passage from Isaiah, chapter 49. Verse 6 of that chapter contains the command quoted by Paul and Barnabas (‘I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth’), but the chapter begins with the command: ‘Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people, from afar.’ It is evident that, for Patrick, Ireland was one of those isles, just as its western coast was one of ‘the ends of the earth’. Someone who had been a slave near the coast of Co. Mayo knew just where the end of the earth was in the Ancient World.

The relationship between Palladius and Patrick will be explored further, once the evidence of Patrick’s own writings has been examined more closely. The two that have come down to us are the *Confessio* and the text usually described as *The Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus* or simply *The Letter to Coroticus*. I shall take the *Confessio* first, although in the opinion of most scholars it was written later than the *Letter*. This is because it is the more revealing document, and enables us to understand the *Letter* better. The *Letter*, on the other hand, does not throw so much light on the *Confessio*.

The writing of the *Confessio* was prompted by what Patrick considered to be his betrayal by a close friend. There are uncertainties about the sequence of events, but the most likely reconstruction is as follows.¹³⁶ Patrick was born to a deacon, Calpornius, the son of a priest, Potitus.¹³⁷ His family belonged to the local nobility of a Romano-British *civitas*.¹³⁸ When he was about sixteen years old, he was captured by Irish

¹³⁵ Acts 13:47.

¹³⁶ Cf. C. Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain*, pp. 310–43, an account which is close to that presented here, except that (1) it remains very uncertain whether Patrick’s home was at the Bannaventa on the Hadrian’s Wall (probably Birdoswald – see Thompson, *Who Was Saint Patrick?*, pp. 9–10) and (2) when Patrick escaped from slavery I take him to have gone to Britain rather than to Gaul (see n. 140 below). He may well, however, have gone to Gaul at some stage (the *fratres* in Gaul mentioned in c. 43 may have been known to Patrick from an earlier visit to judge by his reference to Gallo-Roman custom in *Ep.* c. 14).

¹³⁷ *Confessio*, c. 1, on which see R. P. C. Hanson, *Saint Patrick: his Origins and Career* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 116–18, 176–79, and Thompson, *Who Was Saint Patrick?*, pp. 7–9, who rejects, rightly I think, Hanson’s use of Patrick’s family background to date his birth to the late fourth century.

¹³⁸ *Ep.* c. 10: ‘Ingenuus fui secundum carnem; decorione patre nascor. Vendidi enim nobilitatem meam – non erubesco neque me paenitet – pro utilitate aliorum.’

slave-raiders and taken, with many others, into captivity. He spent six years as a slave, apparently to a single owner.¹³⁹ During those six years he was gradually transformed from an unbeliever (this is how he describes himself even though he was the son of a deacon and the grandson of a priest) into a man whose faith dominated his life. He did not undergo a sudden conversion, but rather a steady transformation of attitude during his years as a slave.¹⁴⁰ After the six years, and thus when he was about twenty-two, a dream directed him to escape. This was not an easy feat, for the district in which he was living as a slave was beside the Wood of Voclut, near Killala in the north of the modern Co. Mayo, close to the Atlantic coast.¹⁴¹ He travelled nearly two hundred miles after his escape and secured passage in an Irish ship by swearing loyalty to his companions 'on the faith of Jesus Christ'.¹⁴² The ship took him to Britain.¹⁴³ He then describes a journey through a desert taking twenty-eight days. This is probably best interpreted as Patrick making his desire to return home for good abundantly clear by comparing his escape from captivity in Ireland to the escape of Israel from captivity in Egypt.¹⁴⁴ Britain was, for him, the Promised Land and also the land in which his ancestors lay buried, just as the Promised Land of the Jews was also the country in which Abraham, Isaac and Jacob lay buried. Why it was so important for him to insist on his desire to return home will appear later.

Although he was briefly captured again, he was not to return to Ireland for many years. Instead he followed his father and his grandfather into a clerical career in Britain.¹⁴⁵ Early in this period, before he became a deacon, he confessed to a close friend – who was himself almost certainly a cleric – a grave sin that he had committed when he was about fifteen, that is, about a year before he was first taken away into

¹³⁹ *Confessio*, c. 17.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, c. 16, 'magis et magis accendebat amor Dei et timor ipsius et fides augebatur et spiritus agebatur'.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, c. 23, where the *adhuc* of 'et adhuc ambulas inter nos' is decisive; T. F. O'Rahilly, *The Two Patricks: A Lecture on the History of Christianity in Fifth-Century Ireland* (Dublin, 1942), pp. 34–5, 60–1, 62–4, Hanson, *Saint Patrick*, pp. 119–20.

¹⁴² *Confessio*, cc. 17–18.

¹⁴³ This has been doubted, but Patrick, *Confessio*, c. 17, reports God as telling him through his dream that 'you are soon to go to your homeland' ('cito iturus ad patriam tuam'), and Patrick did not believe that his God was a liar.

¹⁴⁴ Howlett, *The Book of Letters of St Patrick the Bishop*, p. 110; for the various theories propounded to explain how a band of men could spend twenty-eight days in a desert, see Hanson, *Saint Patrick*, pp. 121–2, Thompson, *Who Was Saint Patrick?*, pp. 30–4.

¹⁴⁵ For clerical families, cf. Orléans I, c. 4 (ed. de Clercq, *Concilia Galliae, A. 511–A. 695*, p. 6); *Codex Theodosianus*, xvi, 2, 9; but note that where the Council of Orléans refers to sons and grandsons, the *Codex Theodosianus* only refers to sons.

slavery.¹⁴⁶ Patrick does not explain what the sin was. In the circles for which the *Confessio* was primarily intended, the sin, as we shall see, was well known. Later, the same friend, in the full knowledge of the sin, declared to Patrick that he, Patrick, ought to be made a bishop.¹⁴⁷ Moreover Patrick was indeed consecrated a bishop (and the prospect of this consecration is likely to have been the occasion for the friend's remark); his consecration should have been preceded by an examination of his fitness for the post.¹⁴⁸ It may be important that, if he had such an examination, he did not apparently reveal his sin to those who were considering his fitness to be a bishop. While Patrick was already a bishop and while he was in Ireland, the friend revealed the sin to the ecclesiastical authorities. Since it was a grave sin, it raised the question whether Patrick ought to be degraded from the episcopate and compelled to undergo a period of penance. The issue appears to have come before a synod, which was undoubtedly in Britain rather than in Ireland.¹⁴⁹ Patrick, although a bishop in Ireland, was ultimately responsible to a British synod. In other words, there was no metropolitan bishop in Ireland to whom Patrick could be subject. The synod may have sent a group of clerics to Ireland in order to question Patrick.¹⁵⁰ The outcome of the synodal hearing appears to have been favourable to Patrick, but only just.¹⁵¹ His friend intervened on his behalf, but there remained a strong body of opinion hostile to Patrick. One of their accusations – related to the adolescent sin, but precisely how we cannot tell – was that he had gone to Ireland willingly and for financial gain.¹⁵² For that

¹⁴⁶ *Confessio*, c. 27.

¹⁴⁷ *Confessio*, c. 32. This is consonant with the notion that Patrick was consecrated a bishop in Britain.

¹⁴⁸ Such an examination cannot be the *defensio* of *Confessio*, c. 32, since Patrick was not present at the latter; for discussion see Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain*, pp. 336–7; E. Malaspina, *Patrizio e l'acculturazione latina dell'Irlanda* (Rome, 1985), pp. 129–43; Hanson, *Saint Patrick*, pp. 131–7. Malaspina is particularly good on fifth-century canonical procedures for choosing, examining and consecrating a bishop; on the other hand, I follow Thomas in not identifying the *defensio* with the examination of the candidate for the episcopate.

¹⁴⁹ *Confessio*, c. 32: Patrick discovers from some of his *fratres* that his friend argued in his favour before the trial (*defensio*); the reason why he has to discover it through third parties is 'because I was not there, and I was not in Britain, nor did the case arise from me', 'quod ego non interfui nec in Britanniiis eram, nec a me oriebatur.'

¹⁵⁰ This is suggested by *Confessio*, c. 26, which refers to *seniores* coming with accusations made against Patrick's discharge of his duties as a bishop; see Hanson, *Saint Patrick*, p. 132.

¹⁵¹ From *Confessio*, cc. 30 and 34, it appears that the outcome was favourable; that opposition did not come to an end with the trial is suggested by *ibid.*, cc. 13 and 45, and, indeed, the whole character of the *Confessio*.

¹⁵² *Confessio*, c. 28, seems to be the principal answer to this accusation. The word *contra*, with which the chapter opens, indicates that what follows is a defence against the accusation based, at least in part, on the adolescent sin, the subject of c. 27.

reason, an underlying anxiety of the *Confessio* is to rebut any accusation that he has profited by his work. Some such accusation probably explains why he went to such length to explain that he had no desire to go to Ireland.¹⁵³

Unsurprisingly, what was being said about Patrick in Britain got back to Ireland, whether *via* the group sent over to question him or in less direct ways. For this reason, the *Confessio*, which is Patrick's defence of his life and his episcopate against the hostile accusations, is addressed first to the ecclesiastical authorities in Britain, but also to his followers in Ireland.¹⁵⁴ There is no evidence in what Patrick says that the affair ended by splitting the Irish Church from its British sponsor. The *Confessio* is intended to rally support both in Britain and in Ireland. It begins by being addressed to British readers, but before the end, when he is recounting the trials and achievements of his episcopate, he turns to appeal for the backing of his fellow-missionaries (many of them presumably British) and of his converts.

Not a single date can be given to any event of Patrick's life. Even relative dates are difficult to find. Patrick's trial occurred thirty years after some event recounted in the *Confessio*.¹⁵⁵ Unfortunately, it is not certain whether this event is the original sin committed when Patrick was about fifteen or the occasion when, before he was a deacon, he confessed the sin to his friend.¹⁵⁶ If the first alternative is preferred, Patrick was about forty-five at the time of his trial; if the second, probably in his fifties.¹⁵⁷ It has been argued that Patrick had even retired from active pastoral work when he wrote the *Confessio*.¹⁵⁸ This is because of his habit of using the imperfect tense for events during his episcopate. So, for example, he says of the women who used to try giving him presents, 'who kept giving me little voluntary gifts, and they kept throwing some of their own ornaments on the altar';¹⁵⁹ if translated 'they used to give' and 'they used to throw', this passage and others like it give the impression that all such concerns were by then a thing of the past. Yet, if we look more closely

¹⁵³ Ibid. ¹⁵⁴ They are the *uos* of *Confessio*, cc. 48, 51, 53.

¹⁵⁵ *Confessio*, c. 27: 'post annos triginta'.

¹⁵⁶ See the discussion of the possibilities in Hanson, *Saint Patrick*, pp. 135–6. Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain*, p. 336, is firmly of the view that it was thirty years after the confession, not the sin, because of the phrasing of c. 27: 'Occasionem post annos triginta inuenerunt me aduersus uerbum quod confessus fueram.'

¹⁵⁷ Hanson's main argument for the second alternative is based upon (a) the belief that the *Epistola* was written before the *Confessio*, and (b) the reference in the *Epistola*, c. 3, to a priest whom Patrick had taught since childhood; but (a) rests on very uncertain evidence, and the priest may have been a Briton and could therefore have been connected with Patrick before the start of his work in Ireland. ¹⁵⁸ Hanson, *Saint Patrick*, pp. 106–7. ¹⁵⁹ *Confessio*, c. 49.

it becomes clear that Patrick is still directly involved in his missionary work and in the mundane difficulties that it entails. Speaking of his expenses in giving gifts to judges, he says that he has spent the price of fifteen men in such presents 'throughout all the districts I was visiting' (or 'used to visit');¹⁶⁰ but he also says, using a Pauline quotation, that he does not repent although 'I spend and shall spend more', not merely money but also, as he has said in an earlier passage, both life and soul.¹⁶¹ Patrick still fears to lose the work that is going so well.¹⁶² His missionary work will, therefore, continue: 'As for those peoples among whom I live, I have offered them the Faith and I shall offer it.' These are not the words of a man retired from the mission-field: he lives and works there still.

The *Confessio* does not provide much evidence on how Patrick went about his work of persuasion and encouragement. What evidence we have is mostly to do with his relations with royal families and with his concern to promote the monastic life.

He seems to have had more success with the children of kings than with the kings themselves. In both the *Confessio* and the *Letter* he refers, in very similar language, to sons and daughters of kings whom he has converted.¹⁶³ One of the most interesting things he says about his relations with powerful men concerns his attitude to gift-giving. Put briefly, Patrick was anxious that, although he might give presents to others in profusion, he should not receive gifts from them in return. He gave gifts to kings so that they should receive him into their presence; he gave gifts to the sons of kings who accompanied him; he gave more gifts to judges so as to facilitate his freedom of movement.¹⁶⁴ It seems as if Patrick's preaching required a steady flow of bribes to powerful people who were themselves pagan and had no intention of changing their beliefs. Yet to call these gifts bribes is probably unhelpful. At a later date Irish society had a finely tuned system whereby gift-giving shaded off imperceptibly into the giving of loans.¹⁶⁵ Lordship over freemen was based upon gifts that entailed service in return.¹⁶⁶ In part Patrick emphasised his attitude to gifts because of the accusation that he had gone to Ireland in the hope of enriching himself. Yet, though that explains why the topic bulks so large in the *Confessio*, it is still necessary to explain what point he was making to these pagan potentates and to his own followers by refusing to accept gifts, even those made by converts as an offertory donation.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., c. 53. ¹⁶¹ Ibid., c. 37. ¹⁶² Ibid., c. 43. ¹⁶³ Ibid., c. 41; *Epistola*, c. 12.

¹⁶⁴ *Confessio*, cc. 52–3.

¹⁶⁵ See above, pp. 73–4; the text *Dliged Raith*, *CIH* 919.25–921.23, provides plentiful evidence.

¹⁶⁶ *EIWK*, pp. 344–63.

In the eighth and ninth centuries, it was characteristic of overkings that they gave gifts to their underkings but did not receive equivalent gifts in return.¹⁶⁷ To give more than one received was an attribute of power. More generally, it could also be an attribute of an especially close alliance. Fosterage, as we have seen, was one of the principal bonds of society. The standard form envisaged the foster-parents receiving an 'after-gift' from the natural parents in return for the expense and trouble of rearing the child. Yet, in some cases, no such after-gift was accepted; and the fosterage then engendered particularly close bonds of affection between the natural parents and the foster-parents and between foster-parent and foster-child. It was a 'fosterage of love'.¹⁶⁸ Non-reciprocity in gift-giving – or, better, no direct reciprocity – was a language which said different things in different circumstances. While Patrick was hardly setting himself up as an quasi-overking, neither was he becoming a foster-father to pagan kings. Whatever the precise significance of his behaviour, it seems to have had two elements. First, Patrick was asserting his own exalted position in a dangerous world. At one moment he is travelling with a company including the sons of kings, a procedure that can hardly be other than political self-assertion: a man's company, his *dám*, was a mark of his status;¹⁶⁹ moreover, sons of kings were used to guarantee political agreements at the highest level.¹⁷⁰ Unless, therefore, the language of social relationships was quite different in the eighth century from what it had been in the fifth, Patrick was cutting a grand figure. Yet the next moment, in spite of all his precautions, he has been placed in chains by men who propose to kill him. He may even have fallen into the unenviable position of being a *cimbid*, someone bound in the prospect of execution, the early Irish equivalent to the condemned man's cell: thus an Irishman glossing a manuscript of St Matthew's Gospel explained the sentence 'having scourged Jesus, [Pilate] delivered him unto them to be crucified' by 'forfeiture of a *cimbid*', because that was the moment at which Christ's execution was finally decided.¹⁷¹ Patrick himself seems to insist on this contrast between grandeur and insecurity, and even to perceive in it one of his principal sacrifices in the cause of the Faith.

¹⁶⁷ E.g. the *rath*, 'gift', 'fief', of *Frithfolad Muman*, ed. J. G. O'Keeffe, in 'Dál Caladbuig and Reciprocal Services between the Kings of Cashel and Various Munster States', in J. Fraser, P. Grosjean and J. G. O'Keeffe (eds.), *Irish Texts*, i (London, 1931), §§ 8, 16. ¹⁶⁸ *CIH* 1764.29.

¹⁶⁹ For example, the *dám* of a bishop, a king and a *sui*, *Crith Gablach*, lines 598–603.

¹⁷⁰ Chapman Stacey, *The Road to Judgment*, p. 92.

¹⁷¹ F. Kelly, *Guide to Early Irish Law*, pp. 97–8; *EIWK*, p. 317; *dílse cimbetho*, *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus*, ed. Stokes and Strachan, p. 484 (by printing only *Iesum flagillatum* from the Gospel text the editors missed the point).

The contrast extends a little further. Although Patrick may travel around in the company of pagan sons of pagan kings, he is also insistent that he has forfeited his status by coming to Ireland. He is not here referring to being carried off into slavery in his youth. In the *Letter* he asserts his inherited status only to say that he lost it of his own free will:

I was a freeman according to the flesh, born of a *decurio* (minor local noble). For I sold my noble status – I do not blush and I do not repent what I have done – for the benefit of others. I am indeed a slave in Christ to a foreign people.¹⁷²

He uses very similar language in the *Confessio*.¹⁷³ While he lost his freedom in his youth by the violence of the Irish raiders, who sold him on the Irish slave-market, subsequently he freely chose to sell the freedom he enjoyed in Britain. Here again, to judge by later evidence, there may be a special point to Patrick's remarks. The contrast between native and alien was an intrinsic element in the ascetic practice of *peregrinatio pro amore Dei*, 'exile for the love of God', as it developed in the sixth century, and likewise also in the practice of penance, again from the sixth century. There were two ways of losing one's freedom – whether for the love of God or otherwise. One was slavery and the other was exile. For the latter there was a distinction between a more severe form, exile overseas, and a less severe form, exile to another kingdom within Ireland.¹⁷⁴ One term, apparently for the exile from overseas, typically an *Albanach* 'Briton' or *Gall* 'Gaul', was *cú glas*, 'grey wolf'. The wolf was the characteristic outsider, both as hapless alien and as the dedicated raider and pirate, the *díbergach* or *féinnid*.¹⁷⁵

The insecurity on which Patrick insists reveals one of the most unusual aspects of his mission. There were two common ways in which mission and conversion occurred in the early Middle Ages.¹⁷⁶ The first is the situation of Clovis and the Franks: a pagan people gained military power over a part of the Roman Empire already largely Christian and did so in circumstances that made it necessary or politic to leave the existing structures of authority largely intact. These included the Church, and pagan kings thus dealt with bishops already well established as the leaders of their cities. The second is the situation of Æthelberht

¹⁷² *Epistola*, c. 10. ¹⁷³ *Confessio*, c. 37.

¹⁷⁴ Charles-Edwards, 'The Social Background to Irish *Peregrinatio*', 46–8.

¹⁷⁵ McCone, 'Werewolves, Cyclopes, *Díberga*, and *Fianna*', 15–16; idem, 'Hund, Wolf und Krieger bei den Indogermanen', in W. Meid (ed.), *Studien zum indogermanischen Wortschatz* (Innsbruck, 1987), 101–54.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe*, pp. 97–129.

of Kent: a pagan king expressed an interest in conversion to Christianity and therefore in guaranteeing the security of any missionary. In both cases conditions existed that ensured, more or less, the safety of unarmed churchmen who wished to convert pagan warriors. Patrick, however, stood outside the norm. To judge by his own writings, his safety was far more at risk than was that of a Remigius of Reims faced with Clovis, or an Augustine of Canterbury faced with Æthelberht.

The second aspect of his work on which Patrick is informative is monasticism.¹⁷⁷ For him the appearance of the monastic life among his converts was the culmination of his mission. That men and women should take a vow of celibacy demonstrated that the making of God's people in Ireland was accomplished.¹⁷⁸ His way of expressing this idea shows that Patrick considered celibacy to be the highest form of Christian life. Perhaps one should rather say form of religious life, since, apart from the standard male and female celibates – *monachi* and *uirgines Christi* – there were also widows and others, probably married people, who had taken a vow of sexual abstinence.¹⁷⁹ Both old and young, married and unmarried, might adopt this form of asceticism.

The importance for Patrick of female celibacy is especially striking. His most cherished achievement, it seems, was the vocation of a young Irish noblewoman.¹⁸⁰ Not long after her baptism she declared that she had received a message from 'a messenger of God', that is, an angel, to say that she should become a 'virgin of Christ' and so come close to God. In spite of opposition from her family, she proceeded six days later to take the veil. Elsewhere, both in the *Confessio* and in the *Letter*, Patrick refers generally to the children of petty kings becoming monks and nuns.¹⁸¹ Yet he seems also, more remarkably in some ways, to have encouraged slavewomen to take up the monastic life even within the limitations of their slavery. His warm support for the celibate life is shown by his preparedness to challenge the authority of kinsmen and of lords in order to encourage anyone, free or slave, to adopt a celibate life. He was entirely aware of the opposition posed by family pressures and by the prohibitions, threats and intimidation of the slave-owners.

Some of this has a clear relevance to Patrick's perception of his own life. The noblewoman's message brought by the angel from God

¹⁷⁷ On this see M. Herren, 'Mission and Monasticism in the *Confessio* of Patrick', in Ó Corráin *et al.* (eds.), *Sages, Saints and Storytellers*, pp. 76–85.

¹⁷⁸ *Confessio*, c. 41: 'perfecta est plebs Domini et filii Dei nuncupantur'. ¹⁷⁹ *Confessio*, c. 42.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, c. 42. ¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, c. 41; *Epistola*, c. 12.

mirrors the messages that came by the same route to Patrick at the great crisis-points of his life, just as his angelic communications mirrored those of the Bible.¹⁸² His strong religious faith and warm appreciation of celibacy owe something, perhaps, not just to his identification of himself with Paul, the apostle to the gentiles, but also to a reaction against his father and grandfather. Their hereditary clerical office – priest and deacon – had permitted Patrick to grow up an unbeliever. Although he never says so, it is highly likely that Patrick was himself a celibate: his wish to visit monastic centres in Gaul is characteristic of the aspiring monk.¹⁸³ His assumption that monastic vows were compatible with pastoral work suggests a comparison with St Martin, of whom he may have known. Finally, his willingness to annoy the owners of slavewomen by encouraging monastic vows even among the unfree presumably owes something to his own experience of emerging religious faith during the time when he was a slave.

A comparison with another British monk and bishop, Faustus of Riez, is helpful – for the differences as much as for the similarities.¹⁸⁴ Faustus was born *c.* 400; his education was evidently uninterrupted and his command of traditional grammar and rhetoric contrasts with Patrick's style. He achieved what Patrick longed for but could not even attempt because of his obligation to his pastoral work in Ireland: Faustus left Britain and entered the monastery of Lérins off the coast of Provence. There he progressed to become abbot but was later made bishop of Riez, one among a procession of Lérins monks into episcopal sees. The relationship of monastic vocation and pastoral work was thus quite different in the two cases: Faustus was monk and theologian first, and bishop only subsequently; Patrick was a celibate bishop promoting celibacy in others as an element in his pastoral work. Faustus presided over a great monastery; Patrick led far too mobile a life ever to put down roots in any cenobitic community.

The emergence of great monasteries in sixth-century Ireland – the likes of Bangor, Clonmacnois, Clonard and Iona – is a phenomenon easier to understand if the ambitions of Patrick for the celibate life are appreciated. Moreover the monastic connections of Palladius and Germanus of Auxerre suggest that Patrick may not have been the first

¹⁸² Cf. Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians in the Mediterranean World from the Second Century AD to the Conversion of Constantine* (Harmondsworth, 1986), pp. 375–92.

¹⁸³ *Confessio*, c. 43.

¹⁸⁴ M. Viller, F. Cavallera *et al.* (eds.), *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* (Paris, 1932–), Fasc. xxxiii–xxxiv (1962), cols. 113–18.

bishop to encourage monasticism in Ireland.¹⁸⁵ Yet Patrick's particular contribution may be better represented by the smaller monastic churches of a later date than by such great houses as Clonmacnois. He seems to have given especial encouragement to the female religious life, an encouragement that extended even to slavewomen. The latter, still subject to their masters, can hardly have experienced any organised monastic community. In any case, his reference to widows and *continentes* – probably married people who had taken a vow of abstinence – suggests a flexible approach to the celibate vocation.

The effect was an absence of any sharp divide in Patrick's mind between the monastery and the world outside the enclosure. The celibate life was the perfection of ordinary Christianity – an asceticism which encouraged a closer approach to God – and was not set apart from it. It is very probable that, for Patrick, the celibate slavewoman still subject to her master was as much an example of the monastic life as was 'the blessed noble Irish girl, a most beautiful woman of adult age'.¹⁸⁶ Patrick perceives the monastic vocation to be one that may be lived by women in the world whatever their circumstances. There is no hint in his writings of the insistence by Benedict in the next century or Cassian in the fifth that the road to a monastic life lay through the cenobitic community, or of Benedict's image of the prospective postulant knocking three times on the monastery door before the abbot within consented to hear his knock – all designed to test the commitment of the stranger. Patrick was an enthusiastic – some would probably have said rash – encourager of vocations.

This rather old-fashioned and unorganised approach to monasticism may explain some odd features of the Irish Church. First, there is the wide extension of monastic vocabulary, thanks to which it is difficult to tell when a church is not a monastery. By 700, at least, *manchuine* was the normal word for the personal service due from a client. Yet it is a derivative of *manach* from Latin *monachus* 'monk'. Similarly, the superior to whom monastic obedience was due was the abbot, yet 'abbot' was a term employed for any head of an independent church.¹⁸⁷ Secondly, there is the way Tírechán writes about the smaller monastic churches and about the relationship of the individual monk or nun to a superior. 'And he (or she) was a monk of Patrick' is one of his standard

¹⁸⁵ See R. Van Dam, *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Berkeley, Cal., 1985), pp. 142–49, on Germanus, and F. Prinz, *Frühes Mönchtum im Frankenreich*, 2nd edn (Darmstadt, 1988), pp. 51–2, on Lupus of Troyes. ¹⁸⁶ *Confessio*, c. 41. ¹⁸⁷ *VT*² 302.

remarks.¹⁸⁸ Taking the veil from Patrick makes a woman a nun of Patrick, in effect an ecclesiastical client.¹⁸⁹ His smaller churches were not infrequently small nunneries combined with a male pastoral clergy. So, for example, Tamnach in the kingdom of the Uí Ailella in Connaught was the church of Mathona, said to be a nun both of Patrick and of Ródán, the saint of another Uí Ailella church, Dumech.¹⁹⁰ Tamnach was Mathona's church and its superiors were her successors. Yet bishops were also consecrated for Tamnach, showing that an episcopal church could also be a nunnery. It might also be a family church. Tírechán portrays Cell Tog, apparently the principal church of Corcu Theimne, a minor kingdom in the west of Connaught, as headed by a bishop and his sister, 'monks of Patrick'.¹⁹¹ On the River Blackwater in Co. Meath, Tírechán has Patrick found a church in which he left three brothers and their sister.¹⁹² The seventh-century Patrician hagiographers have justifiably been judged bad evidence for Patrick in the fifth century: Tírechán, for example, insists on having Patrick accept gifts of female ornaments even though Patrick goes to some pains to say that he avoided accepting them.¹⁹³ On the other hand, Tírechán may give a useful clue to the way in which Patrick's nuns were the high point of his pastoral work. They provided the bases from which bishops worked and were themselves pre-eminent local examples of a life devoted to being God's good neighbour and kinswoman.

Raiding, *díberg*, was the cause of Patrick's *Letter* just as his trial in Britain (although he was still in Ireland) was the cause of his *Confessio*. He had just baptised and anointed a group of converts – they were still, he says, in the white garments of the newly baptised and had the chrism still on their foreheads – when they were attacked by the soldiers of a man named Coroticus in conjunction with Irishmen and Picts. Some of the baptised were killed, but most, and perhaps especially the women, were taken off into captivity. The next day Patrick sent a letter to the raiders with a priest and some clergy, in order to beseech them to free at least some of the captives. The messengers received only mockery. The text we have is not, however, that original letter, sent the day after the attack, but a much more wide-ranging text. It is an open letter intended

¹⁸⁸ Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 20; 22.4; 27.2; 39.8; 47.4; cf. 27.4.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 31.2; 34.2; 37.2; 43.3. The corresponding phrase for a man is *tenuit illum abbatem*, 33.1, which translates Irish *gabai abbaith* as in *Additamenta*, 16. 2. ¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 24–5. ¹⁹¹ Ibid., 47.4.

¹⁹² Ibid., 11, identified by VT² 773–6 with the Áth Dá Loarcc of *Collectanea*, 27.4.

¹⁹³ Compare Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 34.2, with *Confessio*, c. 49.

for several categories of recipient: first, for the soldiers of Coroticus, who were Britons (but not, it should be noted for their associates, Picts and Irish, who were also members of the raiding-party); secondly, for Coroticus himself; thirdly, for all Christians, especially Patrick's fellow-bishops. As it has several categories of intended recipient, so this second letter, the one we have, has several purposes. It excommunicates the soldiers of Coroticus; they are, therefore, understood to be Christians, unlike their Irish and Pictish companions. It also appeals to other Christians, those who are 'holy and humble of heart', to respect the excommunication and to refrain from eating or drinking in the company of the soldiers and from accepting any alms they may offer until they have freed the captives and have done penance. The letter further argues that Patrick has not usurped the episcopal authority of another by this excommunication – an element which must be addressed primarily to the bishop or bishops in question.

It has usually been thought that Coroticus was a British king. According to a table of contents probably added by an eighth-century scribe to his copy of Muirchú's Life of Patrick, the man whose soldiers Patrick had excommunicated was *Coirthech rex Aloo*.¹⁹⁴ Coirthech is an Old Irish form of the name Coroticus.¹⁹⁵ Unlike the form 'Corictic' used by Muirchú, 'Coirthech' had developed regularly from 'Coroticus' according to the sound-changes of spoken Irish.¹⁹⁶ A further point of consequence is that Coirthech does not appear to have been a native Irish name for anyone other than Patrick's adversary.¹⁹⁷ Thanks to the genealogies and martyrologies there is one aspect of Irish life for which evidence is indeed plentiful, and that is personal names. The name Coirthech is not attested in the printed genealogies. Some particularly solid arguments, therefore, need to be advanced before we can dismiss the identification of the eighth-century Coirthech with Coroticus.¹⁹⁸

On the other hand, the form Coirthech only shows, as against Muirchú's Corictic, that the name descended in spoken Irish from the fifth to the eighth century. No parallel argument holds for the

¹⁹⁴ Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, p. 66.

¹⁹⁵ It is similar in date to the forms Cothirthiacus/Coithrige in Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 1.1; 16.4; 51.4; cf. McManus, 'The Chronology of Latin Loan-Words', § 60, pp. 49–51.

¹⁹⁶ Assuming Coroticus > *Corethichah (lying behind Muirchú's Corictic – which may be a British spelling of an Irish form of the name to judge by Ir. *richt*: W. *rhith*) > Coirthech.

¹⁹⁷ D. N. Dumville, in D. N. Dumville *et al.* (eds.), *Saint Patrick, AD 493–1993* (Woodbridge, 1993), p. 115, seems to think otherwise.

¹⁹⁸ Dumville's suggested explanation in *Saint Patrick, AD 493–1993*, p. 115, that Coirthech is an echo of Cothrige, is not attractive.

description of Coirthrech as *rex Aloo*, meaning, in all probability, 'king of Ail Cluaide', namely Dumbarton, the fortress on the north bank of the Clyde that was the capital of the British kingdom of Strathclyde.¹⁹⁹ It is a not unreasonable guess that the description represents an ancient tradition which accompanied the name as it was transmitted from the fifth century – but it remains a guess. On the other hand, we are on much safer ground in holding that Coroticus was at least a Briton, even if he was not king of Strathclyde. The name is well attested in British; moreover, a Christian ruler with pretensions to being a *ciuis*, 'fellow-citizen', of Patrick and even of 'the holy Romans', was undoubtedly a Briton rather than a Pict or an Irishman.²⁰⁰ Furthermore, Coroticus' soldiers are contrasted by Patrick with their Pictish and Irish associates. His soldiers, therefore, being neither Picts nor Irish, were presumably Britons.²⁰¹

Patrick himself never calls Coroticus king. He indicates that Coroticus ordered the expedition but did not lead it.²⁰² He refers to Coroticus' rule as a tyranny, a word that, in Latin, normally meant illegitimate rule, especially supreme authority acquired by a coup d'état. Gildas, in the sixth century, calls various post-Roman British rulers tyrants and also kings.²⁰³ The presumption on the basis of Patrick's *Letter* is, then, that Coroticus was indeed a king, but that still does not tell us the whereabouts of his kingdom.

The soldiers subject to Coroticus appear only to have been one element – the Christian element – in a composite band of raiders. They were the companions of Irishmen and Picts.²⁰⁴ It is not, therefore, surprising that Irishmen and Picts shared in the booty.²⁰⁵ Nonetheless, although the raiders included men who were neither Britons nor, probably, subjects of Coroticus, the king gave the order for the raid. A plausible explanation is that this was what later Irishmen would call *dibergaig*, a sworn band of warriors, called a *fian*, devoted to plundering and killing.²⁰⁶ The language Patrick uses is reminiscent of that later employed by Christian writers for the *fian*; it was seen not just as grossly

¹⁹⁹ Cf. AT 751 = 752; AU 870.6. The double *oo* in *Aloo* is intriguing: if it was not just a slip, it should have represented a long *o*, but that had been shortened centuries earlier (perhaps in the sixth century); a single spelling is, however, uncertain evidence. ²⁰⁰ *Epistola*, c. 2.

²⁰¹ Hanson, *Saint Patrick*, p. 107.

²⁰² It was carried out 'iubente Corotico hostili mente', 'on Coroticus's orders, given with hostile intent', *Epistola*, c. 12.

²⁰³ 'Reges habet Britannia sed tyrannos', Gildas, *De Excidio Britanniae*, c. 27. ²⁰⁴ *Epistola*, c. 2.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, c. 12.

²⁰⁶ Sharpe, 'Hiberno-Latin *Laicus*, Irish *Láech* and the Devil's Men', 75–92, esp. 82–8; McCone, 'Werewolves, Cyclopes, *Diberga*, and *Fianna*', 1–22.

destructive but as intrinsically pagan. Such bands probably participated, as we have seen, in Irish raids on Roman Britain. Moreover, their existence would help to explain Patrick's extreme sensitivity on the nature of the oath he took when he was accepted, after he had escaped from his master, as a member of an Irish ship's crew sailing for Britain.²⁰⁷ Finally, one image Patrick uses of his newly baptised converts as they were attacked by Coroticus' band is that they still had the mark of the chrisam on their foreheads. This would be especially pointed if, as is likely, the *dibergaig*, members of a *fian*, were also distinguished by some mark on their foreheads. The world of Coroticus may then be reminiscent of that portrayed in the saga *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, in which a combined *fian* of Irish and British *dibergaig* destroy the just king Conaire the Great.²⁰⁸

This explanation of the character of the raiding force sent by Coroticus, in which his soldiers had Irishmen and Picts as *socii* – companions or associates – helps to explain a puzzle. When Patrick excommunicated the soldiers he was assuming an authority over Britons who were not part of his flock. They were not his to excommunicate. Their own bishop or bishops might, therefore, have justifiably felt that Patrick was encroaching on their jurisdiction. On the basis of this puzzle it has even been proposed that Coroticus and his men were resident in Ireland not in Britain.²⁰⁹ Admittedly, there were many Britons living in Ireland, slaves and ex-slaves; Patrick implies as much.²¹⁰ Yet the notion of a British king resident in Ireland is not corroborated by anything else we know or can reasonably surmise about the fifth century.²¹¹ Furthermore, Patrick can be seen to be worried as to whether he is usurping another's authority. 'I do not usurp', he says at the beginning of the second major division of the text, and he then offers reasons and texts to justify his statement. If Coroticus and his men had belonged to Patrick's own church, there would have been no need for such explanations. On the other hand, it appears to have been characteristic of the *fian* that its members had, for the time being, no fixed abode. They were typically

²⁰⁷ *Confessio*, c. 18.

²⁰⁸ *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, ed. Knott, §§ 18–23, 44–8; tr. J. Ganz, *Early Irish Myths and Sagas* (Harmondsworth, 1981), 67–8, 72–3.

²⁰⁹ E. A. Thompson, 'St Patrick and Coroticus', *Journal of Theological Studies*, N.S., 31 (1980), 12–27; idem, *Who Was Saint Patrick?*, 125–37.

²¹⁰ *Confessio*, c. 42: 'et de genere nostro qui ibi nati sunt nescimus numerum eorum' suggests, in the context, that Patrick thought that there were many.

²¹¹ On the one hand, D. N. Dumville, 'Coroticus', in *Saint Patrick AD 493–1993*, pp. 107–15, leaves the nationality and residence of Coroticus open; on the other, C. Stancliffe, Review-article on Thompson's *Who Was Saint Patrick?* in *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 31 (1987), 125–32, esp. p. 128, rejects Thompson's arguments, for reasons which I share.

young men without wives or the economic concerns which tied most men to one place.²¹² For a time they were as much resident within Patrick's jurisdiction as anyone else's; and they had at least committed public sin, grave by any Christian standards, against members of Patrick's own church and within his area of pastoral responsibility. Explanation might be needed, but Patrick was not acting unreasonably. The theory which would place Coroticus in Ireland has, therefore, little to recommend it. On the other hand, a British king of Strathclyde might well be able to direct an attack on Ireland by a warband composed partly of his own soldiers and partly of Irishmen and Picts. If this consideration did not suggest the identification of Coirthech as a king of Dumbarton in the first place, which is possible, it gives it more weight than a mere eighth-century scribal guess.

Patrick may not have been acting unreasonably in excommunicating the soldiers of Coroticus, but sweet reason is not the prevailing tone of the text. It has been demonstrated recently that the *Letter* is a tightly organised piece of writing; it was not the letter written in haste the day after the raid, but a considered work destined for a wider audience.²¹³ Yet, however much thought went into its construction, the text remains a moving expression of passionate anger and sorrow. Those who committed the deeds should do 'cruel penance' before they are admitted to Christian society again; and, although 'cruel' may not have its literal meaning, it remains a strong word. Patrick is perhaps especially anxious about the fate of the women: the soldiers of Coroticus have, he says, consigned the limbs of Christ's body to a brothel. One can sense why Patrick might have been a powerful preacher.

Yet, however powerful his writing, one of his most obvious concerns is with his own lack of education. During the years he spent as a slave, he ought to have completed his education at the school of a rhetor. He indubitably had an education, but it was not everything it might and should have been.²¹⁴ Even writing to the soldiers of Coroticus, a king whose fortress – if we may place any trust in the reference to *Coirthech rex*

²¹² McCone, 'Werewolves, Cyclopes, *Díberga*, and *Fianna*', 4–10.

²¹³ Howlett, *The Book of Letters of Saint Patrick the Bishop*, pp. 25–46; *Epistola*, c. 21, 'legatur coram cunctis plebibus et praesente ipso Corotico', shows that the audience, rather than the readership, was intended to be wide.

²¹⁴ Cf. Mohrmann, *The Latin of St Patrick*, 9, 46–7; Malaspina, *Patrizio*, pp. 85–96, sets Patrick's Latinity in context; the commentary in Bieler's edition is fundamental and is complemented by his article, 'Saint Patrick in Latin Language and Literature', *Vigiliae Christianae*, 6 (1952), 65–98, repr. in his *Studies on the Life and Legend of St Patrick*, ed. R. Sharpe, Variorum Reprints (London, 1986), chap. 1, and also by the analysis of 'biblical style' in the edition by Howlett; there is a briefer account in the edition by Hanson and Blanc, pp. 157–63.

Aloo – may have been north even of the old Antonine Wall, he must apologise for the rusticity of his style.²¹⁵ In the *Confessio* he has a difficult passage in which he contrasts himself with some imagined readers, ‘and you, my lords, you refined rhetoricians’.²¹⁶ Modern commentators have accepted Patrick’s self-depreciation at face value. ‘Almost alone among the famous authors of the Roman Empire,’ comments Professor E. A. Thompson, ‘he writes more or less as he spoke . . . he writes laboriously. In spite of all his efforts, he often cannot make his meaning clear.’²¹⁷ Part of this complaint arises from the constant efforts made by scholars to extract from Patrick’s words information that he was not concerned to give, such as where he was working – something his intended readers knew perfectly well without being told. Mostly, however, it derives, as David Howlett has shown, from a failure to appreciate Patrick’s literary style. What Patrick was attempting to do – and achieved with great success – was to write a biblical Latin. His principal stylistic weapon was the device known as chiasmus, namely placing one’s text in ABBA order. One of Howlett’s biblical examples, Lamentations 1:1, will serve as an illustration:

She has been made like a widow	A ¹
the lady among the gentiles;	B ¹
the princess among the provinces	B ²
has been made tributary.	A ²

This pattern is the main structural device of Hebrew poetry but is also carried over into prose. The direct result of ordering a text in such a way is that it cannot be read lineally, because A¹ and B¹ must be read with A² and B² in mind, as well as *vice versa*. Having advanced so far in a certain direction, the text then doubles back on itself and produces a series of variations on its earlier themes, only now in reverse order.

The point of adopting this biblical pattern as the dominant organising principle of one’s prose is best understood by considering the difficulties well-educated Romans had with the Latin Bible.²¹⁸ The Old Latin Bible was a translation from the Greek for the purposes of early Latin-speaking Christians. The latter were not ‘refined rhetoricians’ but mainly ordinary townspeople. The standard rhetoric for Latin prose had been established centuries before, in the days of Cicero; it depended on complex sentences embellished by certain metrical adornments

²¹⁵ *Epistola*, c. 2 (he is *indoctus*); c. 20 (his *imperitia*).

²¹⁶ *Confessio*, c. 13.

²¹⁷ Thompson, *Who Was Saint Patrick?*, p. xv.

²¹⁸ H.-I. Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique*, 4th edn (Paris, 1958), pp. 473–7.

especially at the ends of sentences. For men brought up in such a tradition – a tradition, it should be remembered, according to which rhetorical skill and refinement of language were allied with high social rank – the Latin Bible was distressingly lower-class. A complete conversion to Christianity required, therefore, a perception that the Bible was not so much unrefined but rather had a different style from that of the great pagan orators. Once this feat of cultural intuition was achieved, a possible further step was to abandon the rhetoric of Cicero and Quintilian in favour of the quite different rhetoric of the Bible.

The vast majority of Christian writers in the fourth and fifth centuries preferred to retain the rhetoric in which they had been trained. The schools of the rhetors were open to pagan and Christian alike; indeed, some of the standard works of literature which nourished the curriculum even at the earlier sages of the curriculum were perceived by many, whatever their own religious faith, as intrinsically pagan.²¹⁹ Yet the educational tradition was strong enough to withstand a good many attacks on its religious presuppositions. Gildas was still educated in the full tradition of grammarian and rhetor in the sixth century.²²⁰ In Patrick's Britain, therefore, this rhetorical tradition still endured. Yet he had gone to very considerable pains to master an alternative rhetoric, that of the Bible. The complaints he makes about his own *rusticitas*, his own lack of a full urbane culture, need to be appraised with care. He does contrast his own rusticity with the elevated rhetoric deployed by some of his critics. Yet, precisely when he makes this contrast, he himself uses some of the standard rhetorical embellishments employed by those from whom, in general, he is distancing himself.²²¹ He is saying something to the following effect: 'True, I was a slave by the Wood of Voclut when I should have been in the rhetor's school, but God was my teacher in the midst of my slavery, the style in which I write is that of the Christian Law, the Bible, and I adopted it by free choice, not mere rustic incompetence.' A similar contrast appears in what he says about law: his critics might be *legis periti* 'learned in the law',²²² but elsewhere he uses *lex* ('law') of the Bible as a whole, an understanding that is close to that

²¹⁹ Such as the Emperor Julian; and cf. Augustine's deliberately shocking words, *Confessions*, i.13: 'quibus tenere cogebar Aeneae nescio cuius errores'; Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique*, pp. 345–52.

²²⁰ M. Lapidge, 'Gildas's Education and the Latin Culture of Sub-Roman Britain', in Lapidge and Dumville, *Gildas: New Approaches*, pp. 27–50 (conclusions summarised on p. 47).

²²¹ Howlett, *The Book of Letters of Patrick the Bishop*, p. 96.

²²² *Confessio*, c. 13.

underlying the early eighth-century 'Irish Collection of Canons', *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*.²²³

The style is consistent with Patrick's confident conception of his historical role in the propagation of the Christian Faith. As we have seen, he was acutely aware of the New Testament passages about the task of the missionary, and especially of the idea that the end of the world would not come until the Faith had been preached to the outermost limits. He, Patrick, had taken the Gospel to one of the world's outermost limits, beyond which no man dwelt, where the sun set alone in the Western Sea.²²⁴ He thus asked those refined rhetoricians to consider an inescapable truth: God had summoned him, *stultus*, a blockhead, from among the learned in law and literature, the men of powerful words, the men of weight in affairs, and had inspired him, as long as and only as long as he remained humble in heart and stirred up no wrangling, to serve a foreign people to which the charity of Christ had sent him.²²⁵ The charity of Christ spoke through Patrick's rhetoric, the rhetoric of the Bible; God had left the learned rhetoricians to their law-courts and their council chambers.

(IV) THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MISSION

Patrick as a person we can know more deeply than almost anybody in Antiquity; yet we still have to make educated guesses about his relationship to Palladius and to those other early foreign missionaries who remain little more than names, but are associated with Patrick in later sources, Auxilius, Secundinus and Iserninus.²²⁶ The little we know about these figures can best be tabulated (see table 5.1).

All this information comes from the late seventh century and later. By then it looks as though Iserninus, lacking a feastday and a well-attested church associated with his cult, was less well remembered than were Auxilius and Secundinus. None the less, even he was clearly associated, like Auxilius, with the province of Leinster. Secundinus' church is very probably early, given the use of *domnach*. In the eighth century it lay in the Uí Chernaig kingdom of Southern Brega, one of a trio of

²²³ *Epistola*, c. 9. ²²⁴ *Confessio*, cc. 34, 38, 51.

²²⁵ This paraphrases *Confessio*, c. 13; *sine querella* is a reminiscence of 1 Thess. 2:10 etc.; here, again, Patrick perceives himself as a missionary in the tradition of St Paul.

²²⁶ D. N. Dumville, 'Auxilius, Iserninus, Secundinus, and Benignus', in *Saint Patrick, AD 493-1993*, pp. 89-105.

Table 5.1. *Associates of St Patrick*

Auxilius	(1) Name	Latin; attested but not common.
	(2) Church	Cell Ausaili/Auxili, i.e. Killashee near Naas, Co. Kildare, N 88 16. ¹
	(3) Feast	16 September. ²
Iserninus	(1) Name	Celtic; attested in Old Welsh and Old Breton, but not in Irish. He also had an Irish by-name, Epscop Fith, 'Bishop Fith'. ³
	(2) Church	Various churches among the Uí Chennselaig are associated with Iserninus in the <i>Additamenta</i> , c. 12, but he is associated with Mag Lifi (Northern Leinster) by Tírechán. ⁴
	(3) Feast	Unknown.
Secundinus	(1) Name	Latin, well attested.
	(2) Church	Domnach Sechnaill (Dunshaughlin, Co. Meath, N 96 52). ⁵
	(3) Feast	27 November. ⁶

Notes:

¹ Cell Auxili, *Notulae*, no. 38 (ed. Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, p. 181); Cell Ausili, AU 874.4; Cell Úsaili, VT² 2193; Kylassy in the deanery of Naas, *Taxatio* in H. S. Sweetman and G. F. Handcock (eds.), *Calendar of Documents Relating to Ireland Preserved in Her Majesty's Public Record Office, London, 1302–1307* (London, 1886), p. 246.

² *Martyrology of Tallaght*, ed. Best and Lawlor, p. 71; *Martyrology of Gorman*, ed. Stokes, p. 178.

³ *Additamenta*, 12 (ed. Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, p. 174). MacNeill suggested that Epscop Fith was simply *Episcopus Vetus*, 'the old bishop': *St Patrick*, 2nd edn, p. 122.

⁴ *Collectanea*, 51. 3. Áth Fithot is argued by MacNeill, *Saint Patrick*², p. 127, to be an error, suggested by the name Fith, for Áth Fadat, Aghade in Co. Carlow, s 86 68, on the River Slaney about nine miles south of Rathvilly, the Ráith Bilech at which Crimthann mac Éndai Cennselich (ancestor of the Uí Chennselaig) was said, *Additamenta*, 12.6, to have been baptised by Patrick.

⁵ AU 801.5; 833.14; 842.3 etc.; *Fél.* Notes, 27 November.

⁶ *Fél.* 27 November.

important churches close to Loch nGabor, the crannóg site that was the capital of the kingdom.²²⁷ Southern Brega was, however, a creation of divisions, c. 700, within Síl nÁeda Sláne, the ruling Uí Néill dynasty of Brega. In the fifth century all this region probably belonged to Leinster.²²⁸

About Palladius himself the late seventh-century texts have two different stories to tell. The notes following the text of Tírechán in the

²²⁷ Not in Mide as implied by Dumville, 'Auxilius, Iserninus', p. 98; the other two churches were Trevet (N 97 55) and Kilbrew (O 01 56). ²²⁸ See below, pp. 447–58.

Book of Armagh say that Palladius, 'who was called by another name Patricius', 'suffered martyrdom at the hands of the Irish, as holy old men say'.²²⁹ According to Muirchú, his lack of dedication was matched only by the reluctance of the Irish to hear his message; he abandoned his task and died on his way home among the Picts or the Britons.²³⁰ In the version of this story in the Tripartite Life there is more local detail. Palladius landed at Inber nDea (probably at or near Arklow, the mouth of the R. Avoca);²³¹ he was rejected and shortly afterwards expelled by Nath Í son of Garrchú (Garrchú being the eponym of the Uí Garrchon). Before being sent packing back to Britain, Palladius founded three churches, all apparently close to Inber nDea. There are some indications that this story is at least older than the Tripartite Life. First, the Uí Garrchon appear to have been a powerful dynasty up to c. 600 but not later.²³² Yet the usual context in which such dynastic stories develop is when the dynasty is declining, not when it has become relatively insignificant. The Uí Garrchon were also the victims of another story in the Tripartite Life, at the point when Patrick had entered Leinster on his clockwise circuit round Ireland. His first stop was Naas, at that time (in the ninth century) an important centre of the Uí Dúnlainge. He then made a remarkable detour across the Wicklow Mountains to Ráith Inbir, close to Wicklow Town.²³³ There he was rejected by the king of the Uí Garrchon at a feast he had prepared for his father-in-law, Lóegaire mac Néill, king of Tara. Finally, it may be significant that Muirchú makes Patrick land first of all at Inber nDea, 'a port well-known among us'.²³⁴ Tírechán makes him land on the coast of Brega,²³⁵ and the foundation-story of Trim has him land in the estuary of the Boyne.²³⁶ Muirchú has no obvious reason for making Patrick land first in a principal port of

²²⁹ Ed. Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, pp. 164–6; these notes formed the concluding part of the *Breviarium*. According to Sharpe, 'Palaeographical Considerations', pp. 16–17, Scribe A copied an intermediate MS of the *Breviarium*, which contained Muirchú and Tírechán together with these notes.

²³⁰ Muirchú, *Vita S. Patricii*, i.8; Bieler prefers the reading of *A*, 'in Britonum finibus', as against *BC*'s 'in Pictorum finibus', apparently because in i.9 his death is placed 'in Britannis'; but, for the Irish, the Picts belonged to Britain, and the Tripartite Life (*VT*² 298–9) agrees with *BC*.

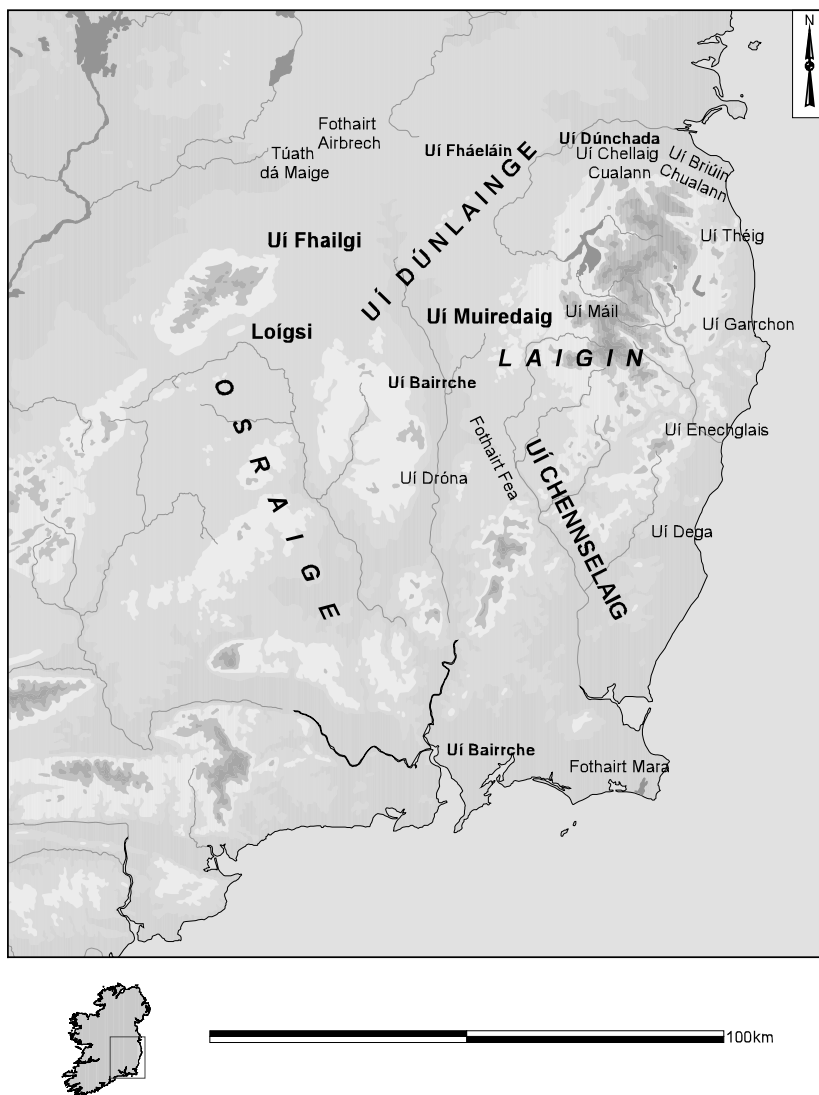
²³¹ Mac Neill, *Saint Patrick*, 2nd edn, p. 67, and L. Price, *The Place-Names of Co. Wicklow* (Dublin, 1945–67), vol. 7, p. vi, identify *Ostium Dee* with Arklow; on the other hand, the Uí Garrchon appear to have been settled near Wicklow Town, which would suggest that Inber nDea was the mouth of the Vartry River. The gen. sg. form *Dee*, *Dea* is probably 'of the goddess'; cf. the River Dee < *Deua* and O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology*, p. 3.

²³² Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, p. 138; A. Mac Shamhradháin, *Church and Polity in Pre-Norman Ireland: The Case of Glendalough* (Maynooth, 1996), pp. 45–6, 75–6.

²³³ Price, *Place-Names of County Wicklow*, p. 478, who suggests that it is the same as Ráith Nue ('i nUib Garrchon i Fortuathaib Laigen', *Fél.* Notes, 18 August), namely Rathnew, r 28 95.

²³⁴ Muirchú, *Vita S. Patricii*, i.11 (ed. Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, p. 76). ²³⁵ Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 4.

²³⁶ *Additamenta*, 1 (ed. Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, p. 166).

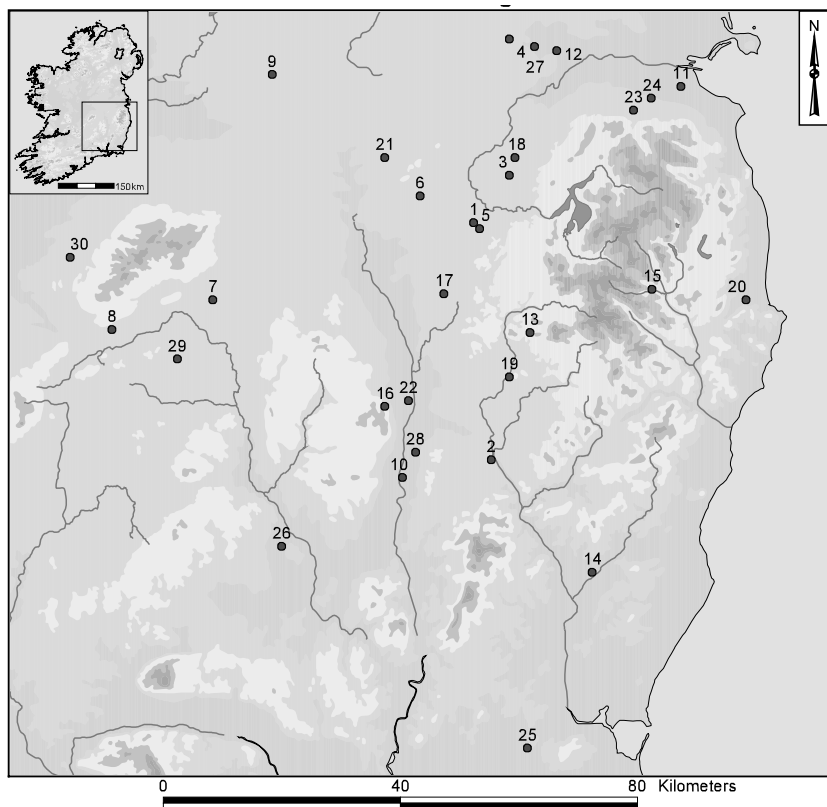


Map 9. Leinster peoples and kingdoms

Leinster rather than in Brega. A possible interpretation of these stories is that they developed from a single original, invented very roughly about 600, when it was still plausible to place a king of the Uí Garrchon in the Liffey plain rather than in his later territory east of the Wicklow Mountains. This original version told the tale of how Palladius was rejected by the king of the Uí Garrchon, not in order to remove the bishop briskly from Ireland, but simply to explain the political decline of the Uí Garrchon in the usual way. One version of the story was then transferred to St Patrick, and it is this one, clumsily updated, which produces the second story in the Tripartite Life. Another version remained attached to Palladius but it also followed the Uí Garrchon east across the Wicklow Mountains. Palladius is now rejected by the unregenerate king close to his port of arrival rather than in the Liffey plain, and he is accordingly expelled from the island after the briefest of stays. A ghost of this story lies behind Muirchú's insistence on bringing Patrick to land at Inber nDea. In other words, a Palladius story has influenced the Patrician legend at two quite separate points, vestigially in Muirchú and more fully in the Tripartite Life, while a version of the original Palladius story also survived in the Tripartite Life.

All this is no more than a reasonable guess, except that Palladius is placed by the hagiographers in Leinster. Put together, the evidence about Auxilius, Iserninus, Secundinus and Palladius acquires a certain consistency and weight. To put the essential point in a negative form: no later evidence suggests that any member of this group was remembered for activities outside the area which can be attributed to Leinster in the fifth century. On the other hand, the clearest location for Patrick's activities is the Atlantic seaboard, including Co. Mayo. Patrick saw himself not as the apostle of Ireland, but as the apostle of the western extremities of Ireland. The role of the Palladian mission came to be obscured, however, when Patrick came to be championed, already by *c.* 600, as the apostle of Ireland.²³⁷ Moreover, the memory of Palladius was also threatened by the vigorous promotion of another cult, that of Brigit of Kildare. In the course of the seventh century, if not earlier, she became the pre-eminent saint of Leinster. At much the same period her cult also

²³⁷ The Hymn of Secundinus, on the assumption that, even if it is not to be attributed to Colmán Elo, it cannot be much later than his time, since it appears to be used by the Hymn in honour of St Camelacus of Rahan, also in the Bangor Antiphonary: *The Antiphonary of Bangor*, ed. F. E. Warren, Henry Bradshaw Society 10 (London, 1895), no. 15, p. 19 (the Hymn of Secundinus is no. 13, pp. 14–16). The cult of Camelacus appears to have been eclipsed by that of Mo Chuta; on this hymn see M. Curran, *The Antiphonary of Bangor and the Early Irish Monastic Liturgy* (Blackrock, Co. Dublin, 1984), pp. 44–6.



- | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Ailenn, Ráith Ailinne / Knockaulin | 16. Glenn Uissen / Killeslin |
| 2. Áth Fadat / Aghade | 17. Maistiú / Mullaghmast |
| 3. Cell Ausaille / Killashy | 18. Nás / Naas |
| 4. Cell Chúaca / Kilcock | 19. Ráith Bilech / Rathvilly |
| 5. Cell Chuilenn / Old Kilcullen | 20. Ráith Inbhir / ?Rathnew |
| 6. Cell Dara / Kildare | 21. Ráith Imgáin / Rathangan |
| 7. Clúain Ednech / Clonenagh | 22. Sléibte / Sleaty, Sletty |
| 8. Clúain Ferta Mo Lua / Clonfertmulloe | 23. Tamlachta Máele Rúain / Tallaght |
| 9. Cróchan Breg Éile / Croghan Hill | 24. Tech Mo Laca / Templeogue |
| 10. Dind Ríg ? | 25. Tech Munnu / Taghmon |
| 11. Domnach Broicc / Donnybrook | 26. Domnach Mór Roigni / Donaghmore |
| 12. Domnach Mór Maige Lúadat | 27. Lathrach Briuin / Laraghbryan |
| 13. Dún Buchat | 28. Ráith Máelsigi / Clonmelsh |
| 14. Fernae / Ferns | 29. Achad Bó / Aghaboe |
| 15. Glenn dá Locha / Glendalough | 30. Saiger / Seirkieran |

Map 10. Sites in Leinster

spread to Wales, demonstrating again the close links between Wales and Leinster.²³⁸ Yet her sainthood probably owes much to a carefully managed takeover of the cult of a pagan goddess or goddesses as well as to the patronage of the Uí Dúnlainge.²³⁹ Columbanus, born in Leinster in the middle of the sixth century, still remembered Palladius as the first great missionary of Ireland. The contemporary evidence of Prosper and Pope Leo suggests that Palladius enjoyed some significant success; this may probably be situated in Leinster, with its close relations with Britain and its links with the memory of the missionary bishop stretching from the late sixth century to the ninth or tenth.

The best available reconstruction of admittedly very unsatisfactory evidence will, therefore, begin with a successful evangelisation of Leinster by Palladius, Auxilius, Iserninus and Secundinus in the middle third of the fifth century. This phase should not be called, as it has been, the 'continental mission to the Irish' by contrast with the later British mission. Since Palladius' involvement with Ireland stemmed in the first place from his interest in Britain, it is safe to assume that Palladius had British support. The name Iserninus bears this out, since it is probably British. This mission will have been facilitated by Leinster settlements in western Britain, as well as by close trading links.²⁴⁰ In particular, such connections across the Irish Sea will have provided a nucleus of men who were bilingual in British and Irish. On the other hand, although Patrick's writings show him to have preached among several Irish peoples (probably *túatha*), his area of the country was still ruled by pagans and remained under the influence of pagan learned orders. He claimed that, without his presence, his achievements could well be lost. The best guess, then, will place Patrick in the second half of the fifth century.²⁴¹

By the generation after Patrick, the essential structure of the Irish Church was in place. It was based upon taking the *túath* as the episcopal diocese, while overkingdoms probably corresponded to the jurisdictions of synods. This is the pattern taken for granted in texts of the seventh and eighth centuries, both legal and hagiographical and both Latin and

²³⁸ This must have occurred in the seventh and eighth centuries to judge by the form of the name, 'Braid' in Llansanffraid, 'Church of St Brigit', of which the earliest example is *Lann Sanbregit, The Book of Llan Dâv*, ed. J. Gwenogvryn Evans and J. Rhys (Oxford, 1893; repr. Aberystwyth, 1979), p. 43; cf. Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain*, p. 453 (§ 78).

²³⁹ In Wales, however, the Christian Braid, because borrowed from Irish, is quite distinct from the native Welsh form of the name, Braint, as in the Anglesey river-name.

²⁴⁰ See above, pp. 155–9.

²⁴¹ Cf. Dumville in *Saint Patrick, AD 493–1993*, pp. 13–18; the case for an early fifth-century Patrick is conveniently summarised in the edn by Hanson and Blanc, *Confession et lettre à Coroticus*, pp. 18–21.

vernacular. Patrick himself dealt with kings and judges in order to facilitate his movement from one people (*túath*) to another. Finally, the *domnach* place-names confirm that the political units, which were often also identifiable settlement units, were taken as the cells of the new ecclesiastical structure. Perhaps the commonest type of *domnach* name in early sources is *Domnach Mór Maige X*, 'the Great Church of the Plain of X'. For example, Domnach Mór Maige Coba was 'the Great Church of the Plain of Cuib'; Mag Coba was a kingdom ruled by the Uí Echach Maige Coba. This church is Donaghmore, Co. Down (J 10 35), the continued importance of which is attested by its High Cross.²⁴² On the west side of the country *domnach* names are rarer; never the less a connection with Patrick's Wood of Voclut is provided by the Domnach Mór in Tírechán's native kingdom of Tír nAmalgada: Tírechán's 'great church of Patrick by the Wood of Fochluth' is, in the Irish of the Tripartite Life, Domnach Mór. There, it was claimed, lay buried Bishop Mucnoe, a disciple of St Patrick.²⁴³

By the second half of the sixth century the conversion of Ireland had been largely achieved. Columba was born around 520 to the ruling dynasty of the far north-west of the island.²⁴⁴ He converted Picts in Scotland but apparently no Irish. Jonas, in his Life of Columba's younger contemporary Columbanus, contrasted the flourishing Christianity of Ireland with the half-heartedness of Gaul.²⁴⁵ By the time of the first centenary of Palladius' mission, it was probably already clear that Irish paganism was a lost cause.

²⁴² P Harbison, *The High Crosses of Ireland: An Iconographical and Photographic Survey*, 3 vols. (Bonn, 1992), i.61–4. ²⁴³ Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 14. 6; 42.7; VT² 1527. ²⁴⁴ AU 519.

²⁴⁵ Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, cc. 2 and 5 (ed. B. Krusch, pp. 153, 161).

CHAPTER SIX

The organisation of the early Irish Church

(I) BISHOPS AND MONASTIC *PARUCHIAE*

In a celebrated passage of his *Ecclesiastical History* Bede described the position of Iona within the Church as follows:

This island, however, is accustomed to have an abbot in priest's orders as its head, so that both the entire province and also the bishops themselves are required, by an unusual ordering of affairs, to be subject to his authority. This is in accordance with the example of Iona's first teacher, who was not a bishop but a priest and a monk.¹

This short description is one of the principal sources of the idea that the early Irish Church, as a whole, was peculiarly monastic. Yet Bede himself was writing about a particular province to which Iona belonged; and by 'province' he usually meant a kingdom or major segment of a kingdom. It would certainly not be a plausible interpretation of his words to say that by 'province' he meant the entire island of Ireland together with those parts of Britain colonised by the Irish. Still more unreasonable would be the notion that Bede's description applied to the British Church as well as to the Irish, and that it constitutes a central piece of evidence for that entity – beloved of modern sectarians² and romantics,³ but unknown to the early Middle Ages – 'the Celtic Church'.⁴

¹ Bede, *HE* iii.4.

² W. A. Phillips (ed.), *History of the Church of Ireland from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1933); in the general editor's preface to vol. 1, *The Celtic Church*, he wrote of the book: 'It is a reasoned defence of the claim of the Church of Ireland to be, both institutionally and in all the essential articles of the Catholic faith, the legitimate successor of the Church founded by St Patrick and the early Irish saints'; the programme as described by Phillips remained, ultimately, the same as that of Archbishop Ussher in the seventeenth century, or, for England, that of Archbishop Parker in the sixteenth.

³ Such an attitude informs a book that has many good points: N. K. Chadwick, *The Age of the Saints in the Early Celtic Church* (London, 1961).

⁴ K. Hughes, 'The Celtic Church: Is This a Valid Concept?', *CMCS*, 1 (Summer 1981), 1–20, repr. in her *Church and Society in Ireland, AD 400–1200*, ed. D. N. Dumville, Variorum Reprints (London, 1987), no. xviii; W. Davies, 'The Celtic Church', *Journal of Religious History*, 8 (1974–5), 406–11; *eadem*, 'The Myth of the Celtic Church', in N. Edwards and A. Lane (eds.), *The Early Church in Wales and the West*, Oxbow Monograph, 16 (Oxford, 1992), pp. 12–21.

Yet Ireland had many great monasteries by the seventh century, some of which, like Iona, may, 'by an unusual ordering of affairs', have exercised an authority over bishops. Furthermore, it is undeniably true that Ireland had never been part of the Roman Empire, and also that the normal ordering of dioceses and provinces in such parts of the Empire as Gaul followed the imperial divisions of government. True, even within the Empire the parallelism of ecclesiastical and secular government never quite reached the hierarchical completeness desired by Justinian I. For him the bishop was merely to be the bottom rung, presiding over a single city and its appendant territory; above the ordinary bishop came the metropolitan bishop in charge of a province; above the metropolitan was 'the most blessed archbishop and patriarch of that diocese' (in the Late Roman sense whereby, for example, Britain was an imperial diocese).⁵ As we shall see in a later chapter, such an ordering of authority was not entirely absent from the West, but archbishops and patriarchs were very rare birds. The bishop was everywhere the accepted leader of the local church, both clerical and lay, and it was acknowledged that he presided over a city. Yet Ireland in the fifth and sixth centuries had no cities. Not merely did it lack, then, the administrative framework of the Empire, it also lacked the urban centres, the building blocks from which the entire structure was created.

The problem should not be exaggerated. Christianity had spread to areas in the east, such as Armenia, which lay outside the reach of the urban civilisation found in the coastlands of the Mediterranean. Even in Gaul, many cities would probably have vanished in the sixth and seventh centuries if they had not been episcopal centres: the bishop often sustained the city, not the city the bishop.⁶ Some, such as Marseilles, Orléans and Paris, were undoubtedly significant centres of commerce; in Verdun, lying between the trade-routes of the Rhône and Sône to the south and the Meuse to the north, the local bishop's ability to extract a large loan from a Frankish king put the local merchants back on their feet;⁷ but in other towns, such as Tours, the walled area was very small and was largely occupied, except on feastdays, by the clergy, monks, nuns, pious hangers-on, and those poor who subsisted on

⁵ Gregory the Great, *Registrum*, ed. D. Norberg, CCSL 140 and 140 A (Turnhout, 1892), xiii.50, gives a Latin version of Justinian I, *Novel.*, 123, c. 22, *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, ed. Th. Mommsen, P. Krueger and R. Schoell, iii, *Novellae*, ed. R. Schoell, 5th edn (Berlin, 1928), pp. 611–12; on this see below, pp. 420–1.

⁶ E.g. Nantes (in Gregory of Tours and Venantius Fortunatus, the see of Bishop Felix) and Clermont were both small cities largely sustained by their churches, both within and without the walls. ⁷ Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* iii.34.

the episcopal dole.⁸ A further argument against exaggerating the contrast between Ireland and the Empire is that in Gaul the secular administration based upon the city – and therefore the ecclesiastical administration also – was a Roman application of a pre-existing Celtic pattern. The Gaulish Arverni, who gave their name to the Auvergne, acquired an urban centre, Clermont; in Clermont, therefore, the bishop came to reside, even though he was bishop of the Arverni as a whole. One may be reasonably confident that a similar development took place in Britain, although here there is far less evidence.⁹ Those who set about converting the Irish might be expected to follow the Gallic pattern, but without the cities; that is to say, one would expect to find a bishop of the Ulaid corresponding to the bishop of the Arverni; but there would be no walled city encompassing the cathedral complex and surrounded by extra-mural cemeteries and their associated churches, as at Clermont.

Such an expectation was one of the cornerstones of the theory put forward in the 1960s by Kathleen Hughes.¹⁰ Her views have not gone unchallenged, but they were advanced with great clarity and they still enjoy partial acceptance. According to Hughes, following earlier scholars such as Kenney,¹¹ the unit chosen as the Irish counterpart to the Gallic and British city was the *túath*, the small kingdom or people ruled by the *rí túaithe*, 'the king of a people'. This was the unit out of which larger political structures were constructed, just as the Roman province and diocese were made up of cities. The early missionaries, it is argued, had to find some counterpart to the city, since the bishop was the crucial person in the pastoral life of the Church; without him there could be no full Christian life. No doubt the very first bishops would need to be active over a larger area than the *túath*; but, as soon as the Church had become

⁸ The aristocracy were required to come to city for feastdays, Orléans (541), c. 3, *Concilia Galliae*, ed. de Clercq, pp. 132–3; on the matriculated poor see *Testamentum S. Remigii Episcopi*, ed. B. Krusch, MGH SRM 3, pp. 336–40, repr. CCSL 117/1 (1957), 474–9, esp. lines 48–50, 131–2; C. Pietri, 'Remarques sur la topographie chrétienne des cités de la Gaule entre Loire et Rhin (des origines au vii^e siècle)', *Revue de l'Histoire de l'Eglise de France*, 62 (1976), esp. 198–201; L. Pietri, *La Ville de Tours du IV^e siècle: naissance d'une cité chrétienne*, Ecole française de Rome, 69 (Rome, 1983), pp. 343–430 (p. 344 on the area of the walled city: about 9 hectares); M. Vieillard-Troiekouroff, *Les monuments religieux de la Gaule d'après les œuvres de Grégoire de Tours* (Paris, 1976), pp. 85–104 (on Clermont-Ferrand), 304–29 (on Tours).

⁹ The acceptance of the norm that each *civitas* should have its bishop is already evident in the subscriptions to the Council of Arles, AD 314, *Concilia Galliae, A. 314–A. 506*, ed. C. Munier, CCSL 148 (Turnhout, 1963), pp. 14–24.

¹⁰ Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society* (London, 1966), chaps. 4–8.

¹¹ Kenney, *Sources*, 291–2, on which see R. Sharpe, 'Some Problems concerning the Organization of the Church in Early Medieval Ireland', *Peritia*, 3 (1984), pp. 230–3.

widely established, there would have to be a delimitation of authority. The boundaries used by the church would hardly be newly devised for the purpose; as in the Empire, the limits of dioceses would follow secular boundaries.

According to Hughes, therefore, the early missionaries gradually created a church governed by bishops, a church in which the *túath* became the counterpart of the *civitas*.¹² Yet she also argued that this pattern of organisation failed to endure. In the course of the sixth and seventh centuries it was largely replaced by a church based upon the monastic *paruchia*.¹³ *Paruchia* is here a Hiberno-Latin spelling of the normal Late Latin *parochia*, used in contemporary Gaul for rural communities provided with regularly staffed churches: the rural *parochia* was contrasted with the *civitas*, the episcopal city, and also, sometimes, with oratories established on aristocratic estates.¹⁴ The Gallic *parochia* was sometimes, at least, served by a community headed by an *archipresbyter*.¹⁵ In the British Church, however, *parochia* is used in the singular to mean the territory subject to, but distinct from, the episcopal church: Asser talks of the monastery and *parochia* of St David's, where an episcopal monastery has a *parochia* attached to it.¹⁶ This more general use of the term is probably older than the application in Frankish Gaul of the term to an individual non-episcopal church; and it is clear that the Irish use of the term agreed with the British rather than the Frankish

¹² A possible example is given by the obit of Bishop Béoáed of Ardcarna, AU 524. According to *Fél.* Notes, 8 March, Ard Carna was in Mag Luirg; this is likely to be correct, since it may be identified with the Church of Ireland parish church of Ardearn (cf. Ardearn Ho., 4 miles E. of Boyle, Co. Roscommon, at G 86 02). There is apparently a trivallate ringfort in the same parish (not marked on the 1/3"). Hence the church of Bishop Béoáed may have been the original episcopal see of Mag Luirg, adjacent to a royal centre but later to be overshadowed by Ess Mac nEirc (Assylin, just to the west of Boyle), shown by VT² 1662 to be a Columban church by the end of the ninth century.

¹³ For a critical discussion of the way this term has been used by scholars, see Sharpe, 'Some Problems concerning the Organisation of the Church', 243–7; the term is further discussed by C. Etchingham, 'The Implications of *Paruchia*', *Ériu*, 44 (1993), 139–62.

¹⁴ Examples are: Epaon, c. 25, *Concilia Galliae*, AD 511–695, ed. C. de Clercq, CCSL 148 A (Turnhout, 1963), p. 30; Vaison, AD 529, c. 2 (*ibid.* p. 79), Clermont, c. 15 (*ibid.* p. 109); but in Orléans, AD 541, c. 26 (*ibid.* p. 139) it includes the estate-church.

¹⁵ For example, Clichy, AD 626, c. 21 (*Concilia Galliae*, ed. de Clercq, p. 305). This *parochia* is comparable with the Anglo-Saxon minster: see J. Blair, 'Minster Churches in the Landscape', in D. Hooke (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Settlements* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 35–58; *idem*, 'Anglo-Saxon Minsters: A Topographical Review', in J. Blair and R. Sharpe (eds.), *Pastoral Care before the Parish* (Leicester, 1992), pp. 226–66; S. Foot, 'Anglo-Saxon Minsters: A Review of Terminology', *ibid.*, pp. 212–25; E. Cambridge and D. Rollason, 'Debate: The Pastoral Organization of the Anglo-Saxon Church: A Review of the "Minster Hypothesis"', *Early Medieval Europe*, 4/1 (1995), 87–104; J. Blair, 'Debate: Ecclesiastical Organization and Pastoral Care in Anglo-Saxon England', *Early Medieval Europe*, 4/2 (1995), 193–212. ¹⁶ Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, ed. W. H. Stevenson (Oxford, 1904), c. 79, pp. 65–6.

one.¹⁷ Yet, in all three countries the original contrast between the city, the *civitas* and its surrounding countryside, the *parochia*, is still echoed.¹⁸

In discussions of the Irish Church, however, the word *paruchia* has acquired the special sense of a group of daughter-monasteries controlled by the abbot of the mother-house.¹⁹ So, for example, the monastery of Applecross on the west coast of Scotland opposite Skye was founded in 673 from Bangor on Belfast Lough.²⁰ In 802 the annals record the obit of Mac Óige of Applecross as abbot of Bangor;²¹ the implication is that Applecross had remained subject to its mother-church, so that a monk from the daughter-house could appropriately be promoted to be abbot of Bangor.²² Such links extended beyond the bounds of any one *túath*, and the authority of the abbots of great monasteries could thus overshadow that of the bishops.

The evidence for the earliest stages in the growth of Irish ecclesiastical organisation is, unsurprisingly, meagre. A crucial text for Kathleen Hughes's argument was a collection of early Irish canons known as *The First Synod of St Patrick* or *The Bishops' Synod*.²³ It survives in a single manuscript written in West Francia, probably at or near Tours, in the second half of the ninth century – a manuscript which also contains other Irish and British texts.²⁴ The *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* (716 x 725) quotes several passages and attributes almost all to Patrick; a similar line is taken by the introductory sentence in the manuscript itself: 'Here begins the Synod of the Bishops, that is, of Patrick, Auxilius, Iserninus.' Auxilius and Iserninus, together with Secundinus, were the three bishops said to have been sent in 439 to assist Patrick.²⁵ Secundinus was the first to die, according to the fifth-century annals,²⁶ so that, if the ascription of the synod to Patrick, Auxilius and Iserninus was following the same tradition, it may have been thinking in terms of a date between 447 and the annalistic obit of Auxilius in 459. The connection of the canons with St

¹⁷ *Hib.* i.22. a; xxxvii.20. b; xlii.21 (in title); cf. C. Etchingham, 'Bishops in the Early Irish Church: A Reassessment', *Studia Hibernica*, 28 (1994), 49: 'The basic connotation of the word in this material [sc. Irish canon law] is undoubtedly a sphere of episcopal pastoral jurisdiction.'

¹⁸ An Irish example which provides a link with the ancient contrast between *civitas* and rural *parokia* is *Hib.* xxxvii. 20 b (and cf. xxxvii.14).

¹⁹ See Hughes's definition in *The Church in Early Irish Society*, p. 63.

²⁰ AU 673.5.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 802.5.

²² Cf. *ibid.*, 613.1, 'The repose of Finntan of Óentrab [Antrim], abbot of Bangor', and 770.6, the obit of Folachtach of Tech Tue, abbot of Clonmacnois. Tech Tuae is Taghadoe near Maynooth.

²³ Ed. Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, pp. 54–9; M. J. Faris et al., *The Bishops' Synod* ('*The First Synod of St Patrick*') (Liverpool, 1976).

²⁴ Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS 279 (Bieler's W); see Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, p. 15; Faris et al., *The Bishops' Synod*, pp. 11–13.

²⁵ AU 439.1.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 447.

Patrick has been accepted by several scholars,²⁷ but Binchy placed them in the seventh century and Kathleen Hughes argued that the text belonged to the sixth century rather than to the fifth.²⁸ She offered four arguments: first, there is an established diocesan structure; secondly, there is a full complement of clerical grades; thirdly, clerics are obliged to participate in the offices of matins and vespers; fourthly, cenobitic monasticism is already present. She also argued, against Binchy, that the canons belonged to the sixth rather than to the seventh century, principally on the grounds that they suggest that the Church still existed in a pagan environment, in which secular authority, notably that of the lawyers, remained hostile or indifferent.²⁹ Yet the canons in the *Hibernensis*, culled principally from earlier texts of the seventh century, disclose a Christian society in which the Church worked closely with judges and kings.³⁰ The argument against dating the text to the seventh century is persuasive: Columbanus, who left Ireland c. 590, was confident that the Christianity of his native island would bear favourable comparison with that of Frankish Gaul; in the late sixth century Columba met pagans among the Picts, but apparently not among the Irish; legal texts, often betraying a Christian standpoint, began to be written about the middle of the seventh century.

The arguments against a fifth-century dating are not so strong. Two elements in the case must be distinguished. There is the negative point that the ascription in the manuscript cannot carry much weight. By the eighth century, when the *Hibernensis* testifies that the canons were already associated with Patrick, it was widely believed that early Irish Christianity was, with some modest assistance, the work of Patrick, to whom, therefore, a text which appeared to be early might well be attributed. One does not have to assume that, in the early eighth century, such an attribution was part of any propaganda drive by Armagh; the *Hibernensis* was not likely to be a party to any such thing. The positive element in the case is, however, less secure: St Patrick's own writings show a Church with both secular clergy and monks.³¹ True, if one places

²⁷ J. B. Bury, *The Life of St Patrick and his Place in History* (London, 1905), pp. 233–45; L. Bieler, 'St Patrick's Synod: A Revision', in *Mélanges offerts à Mlle. Christine Mohrmann* (Utrecht, 1963), pp. 96–102.

²⁸ Binchy's late dating is advanced in his 'Patrick and his Biographers', 45–9; Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, pp. 44–53; *eadem*, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 68–71.

²⁹ See also Binchy's later article, 'St Patrick's "First Synod"', *Studia Hibernica*, 8 (1968), pp. 49–59, where he accepts the possibility of a date in the second half of the sixth century.

³⁰ *Synodus Episcoporum*, c. 21, prohibits any Christian from taking a case to a secular court. This is not repeated in the *Hibernensis*.

³¹ *Confessio*, cc. 41–2, and *Epistola*, c. 12 (monks and nuns); *Confessio*, cc. 38, 40, 50, 51, and *Epistola*, c. 3 (clerici and a presbyter).

the *floruit* of St Patrick early in the fifth century his *Confessio*'s picture of a Church with a relatively fluid structure would apply to the whole country: there would be no province notably more advanced in its development than the areas where Patrick was working, since Ireland's first bishop had only arrived in 431. The arguments from the text's information on diocesan structure and the liturgical duties of the clergy would then show that Patrick was unlikely to have had anything to do with the Synod as claimed both by the *Hibernensis* and by the introductory sentence in the text of the Synod itself.³² They would not, however, show that the Synod could not belong to the late fifth century. Yet a later dating for St Patrick (as maintained above)³³ removes much of the significance from the issue of the attribution. To say that the text is unlikely to be later than the middle of the sixth century is to date it no more than one or two generations after St Patrick. *The Bishops' Synod* thus gives us precious evidence for the Irish Church in the form in which the missionary efforts of Patrick and others had left it. That is not to say that it illuminates the entire Irish Church. Irish synods from the late sixth century at least seem normally to have been provincial, not national. Moreover, we have no clear means by which to identify the province in question.³⁴

The text falls into four sections: an introduction; a set of canons about the clergy (1–11); some canons about Christians in general (12–22); and a concluding section mainly about clerics and monks (23–34). The *Hibernensis* took its quotations from all four sections including the introduction, thus suggesting that the original text cannot have been very different from the one we have, even though the latter is preserved in only one manuscript. The synod is insistent on the authority of the bishop over what it calls the *plebs* or *parochia*.³⁵ The clergy in particular, of course, are to be subject to him: no outsiders, no wandering clerics, are to perform any function within the *plebs* without his permission.³⁶ As in Gaul in the sixth century, the synod insists that no priest may celebrate mass in a church before a bishop has consecrated it.³⁷ More

³² Cf. the discussion above pp. 215–16. ³³ See above, pp. 237–9.

³⁴ On these limitations, see D. N. Dumville, 'St Patrick at his "First Synod"', in Dumville *et al.*, *Saint Patrick, AD 493–1993*, pp. 177–8.

³⁵ *Plebs*: cc. 1, 3, 24, 27, 33. *Parochia* (*parruchia*): 30, 34. The *parochia* of c. 34 appears to be the same as the *plebs* of c. 33. The spelling *parruchia* is normal in Hiberno-Latin.

³⁶ *Synodus Episcoporum*, cc. 24, 27, 33.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, c. 23; cf. Orléans 511, c. 17 (ed. de Clercq, *Concilia Galliae*, p. 9); Orléans 541, c. 7 (ed. de Clercq, pp. 133–4); for the seventh century cf. Chalon-sur-Saône, c. 14 (ed. de Clercq, p. 306); *Hib. xliii.2* (an abbreviated version of Orange 441, c. 9 (10) (ed. Munier, *Concilia Galliae, A. 314–A. 506*, pp. 80–1).

controversially, perhaps, he is to keep a tight rein on relations between Christians and pagans. Alms are not to be accepted when they are given by *gentes*, probably 'pagan kindreds'.³⁸ No one may swear before the druid 'as pagans do'.³⁹ Any Christian who summons someone who has committed an offence against him to appear before a judge rather than appealing to a church is to be excommunicated; he should instead summon him before an ecclesiastical tribunal.⁴⁰

In the early eighth-century vernacular laws the bishop is set over the *túath*, 'people'.⁴¹ This term has a double meaning in an ecclesiastical context: either the population of the small kingdom over which the 'king of a *túath*' rules or, more specifically, the laity as opposed to the clergy.⁴² The 'people', *plebs*, over which the bishop presides according to *The Bishops' Synod* is very likely to be the *túath* in the first of these senses.⁴³ Later *plebs* undoubtedly corresponds to *túath* in the other sense also, as in the phrase *plebeus/plebilis homo* which is equivalent to *fer túaithe*, 'layman'.⁴⁴ In the *Synod*, *plebs* is the entire local community, not just the laity: no one should collect money for ransoming captives in his *plebs* without permission; there should be no vagrant cleric in the *plebs*.⁴⁵ The term *plebs*, however, is much less widely used in Gallic canons of the same period for the people subject to a bishop;⁴⁶ and this makes it more likely that the Synod's *plebs* is the Irish *túath*. The clear implication is that the early missionaries in Ireland made the decision to take the *túath* as the unit of episcopal government corresponding to the *civitas* of the Empire. Well before the phase of conversion was over, this decision had been put into practice, enough at least for the canons to assume that a *plebs* will be subject to a bishop.

Yet the Synod also provides early evidence for two other terms which would be widely employed in succeeding centuries: *princeps* and

³⁸ *Synodus Episcoporum*, c. 13. ³⁹ *Ibid.*, c. 14.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, c. 21, accepting Bieler's text rather than that of Faris *et al.*

⁴¹ *Críth Gablach*, lines 598–606; on the other hand there could be higher grades of bishop: see *Uraicecht Becc* in *CIH* 1618.5 (where the *ollam uasaleascub* is in rank equivalent to the king of a province such as Munster); he may be the same as the *episcopus episcoporum* of *Hib.*, v. 9 (ed. and tr. Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, pp. 174–5). Cf. Etchingham, 'Bishops in the Early Irish Church', pp. 50–3.

⁴² For the first sense, see above, pp. 102–6; for the second, especially *Córus Béscnai* in *CIH* 529.20; 530.32 (but in 523.5, *túatha* seems to include both clergy and laity, the latter being *áes túaithe* regulated according to the *córus túaithe*).

⁴³ Cf. Adomnán, *VSC*, ii.4 (the *plebs* of the kingdom of Ard Ciannachtae in Brega), ii.45 (the *plebs* of the kingdom of Cenél Loairn in Scottish Dál Riata); *EIWK*, pp. 138–9.

⁴⁴ Adomnán, *VSC*, i.1, 16.

⁴⁵ *Synodus Episcoporum*, cc. 1, 3. Cf. the collocation *reges et plebes* in the same context, *Hib.* xlii.26. b.

⁴⁶ *Plebs* is occasionally used in general phrases about the people subject to a bishop, or the clergy and people who should participate in the election of a bishop: Orléans 549, c. 10, Mâcon 585, c. 1 (*Concilia Galliae*, ed. de Clercq, pp. 151, 239).

abbas.⁴⁷ *Principatus* is used for the authority of a neighbouring bishop: if a bishop goes from his *parochia* into that of another, he may not exercise episcopal functions until he has received permission from the one who is in his own *principatus*.⁴⁸ In c. 34 the one term *abbas* is used both for the superior of a deacon and for the superior of a monk. *Princeps* and *principatus* were later used in a wide sense for any kind of ecclesiastical, and even occasionally secular, authority. Typically, the *princeps* was the head of a church, whatever the character of that church.⁴⁹ *Abbas* was a more personal term (*abba* 'father') for any superior of a religious community or of an individual. In sixth-century Ireland, it was not yet monopolised by monks: the *abbas* was not always an abbot. When we later meet the pope being described as 'abbas of Rome',⁵⁰ this is not necessarily because the early Irish Church was so monastic that it conceived of all ecclesiastical superiors as abbots, but rather because *abbas* preserved an older and wider meaning lost in the rest of Latin Christendom.⁵¹ Elsewhere, however, the text of the *Synod* shows a readiness to innovate. Gregory of Tours' habit was to keep *ecclesia* for the cathedral church, while referring to non-episcopal churches as *basilicae* or *parochiae*, the former principally for suburban cemetery churches, the latter for regularly staffed country churches.⁵² In this way Gregory preserved the sense of the bishop as the head of the whole community, and thus of his church as a church set above all others. In the *Synod*, however, a priest who builds a church, and ought to wait for his bishop to consecrate it before saying mass there, is said to have built an *ecclesia*.⁵³ *The Bishops' Synod* thus provides precious evidence that the vocabulary of ecclesiastical life was not the same in Ireland (and perhaps Britain) as in Gaul. This may serve as a warning that one must always distinguish between terminological peculiarities

⁴⁷ *Synodus Episcoporum*, cc. 30 (*principatus*), 34 (*abbas*).

⁴⁸ Cf. *Hib.* xxxvii.14, 20 *b*, for the *princeps* and his *parochia*. In the latter, *parochia* appears to be the laity subject to the *princeps*. For bishops as *principes*, see *Hib.* xxxvii.24. *c*.

⁴⁹ *Hib.* xxxvii, *De Principatu*, esp. 20 *b*, 24 *c*, 37. ⁵⁰ *VT*² 302.

⁵¹ See G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford, 1961), *s.v.*, where three senses are distinguished: (1) a title of respect applied to monks in general, especially to prominent ascetics and monks, and abbots of monasteries; (2) the abbot; (3) a title of respect given to priests and bishops as spiritual fathers (e.g. Cosmas Indicopleustes, ed. W. Wolska-Conus, *Cosmas Indicopleustes: Topographie chrétienne*, 3 vols., SC 141, 159, 197 (Paris, 1968–73), iii.15, = *PG* lxxx.321B). If one combines (1) and (2) it is clear that we have an earlier, less specialised sense of *abbas*, directly influenced by *abba* 'father'. In Latin, the wider sense is exemplified by Cassian, *Conl.* i.1.

⁵² Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* vi.38; *Vita Patrum*, ed. B. Krusch, MGH SRM i.2, iv.2.

⁵³ *Synodus Episcoporum*, c. 23; cf. the *Eccles* place-names which show that in post-Roman Britain *ecclesia* was quite widely used for the building rather than the community. On the other hand, the *domnach* place-names in Ireland, discussed later in this chapter, preserve the distinction between the place, Greek *kuriakon* (> church) and Latin *dominicum* (> *domnach*), and the community, the *ecclesia*. It looks as though the situation in fifth-century Britain was transitional.

and differences of substance in the organisation itself. *The Bishops' Synod* offers good evidence for an episcopally governed church; moreover, the church revealed by these canons has its own individual character. It is not a mere transplant of the organisation found in Gaul in the fifth and early sixth century, though it is likely to have resembled the British Church quite closely.

In the fifty years between 525 and 575 many of the great monasteries of Ireland and western Scotland were founded: Clonard, Clonmacnois, Iona and Bangor, to name only four of the most distinguished houses.⁵⁴ In all these four cases, the principal house had daughter foundations which remained attached more or less closely to the parent community.⁵⁵ Adomnán's *Life of St Columba of Iona* reveals in passing that Columba's monasteries included Durrow in the Midlands; the 'Plain of Long' on Tiree; a monastery on an unidentified island called Hinba; one on another unidentified island called Elen; a monastery by Loch Awe; Derry, a small monastery apparently close to Louth; the church of Diáthrab and probably Boyle in the upper Shannon area; and Drumhome, Co. Donegal.⁵⁶ There may also have been a Columban church in Brega, in the midlands;⁵⁷ Rechru (Lambay Island) was founded by the fifth abbot of Iona, Ségéne, in 635.⁵⁸ The standard practice was apparently for the abbot of Iona, probably in consultation with his senior monks, to appoint *praepositi*, 'priors', to act as superiors of the subordinate houses.⁵⁹ Moreover, the abbot of Iona commonly went on tours of inspection around these subject communities.⁶⁰ Ségéne, for

⁵⁴ Kenney, *Sources*, pp. 372–448; in AU the obits of the founders are, for Finnio (Finnián) of Clonard and Cíarán of Clonmacnois, 549, for Columba of Iona, 595 (in error for 597), and for Comgall of Bangor, 602.

⁵⁵ Adomnán describes Iona as Columba's 'mother church', *matrex ecclesia*, *VSC*, i.5.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 2nd Preface (a monastery by Louth), i.2, 20 (Derry), 21 (Hinba), 29 (Durrow), 30 ('the Plain of Long' on Tiree), 31 (a monastery by Loch Awe), 41 (Boyle), 50 (Cell Mór Diathraib); ii.18 (Elen); iii.23 (Drumhome). On the pre-Viking *paruchia* of Iona, see Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, pp. 31–5.

⁵⁷ Adomnán, *VSC* i.40: the saint is in Brega (cf. i.38) and Trevet was a *uicinum monasterium*. This does not mean that Trevet was close to Brega, since it was in the middle of that district, and it suggests that Columba may have had a church in Brega to which Trevet was *uicinum*. Alternatively, Adomnán may simply have omitted to mention the name of a church, not subject to Iona, which Columba just happened to be visiting. Swords and Skreen were later Columban churches, but there is no clear pre-Viking evidence: Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, p. 94. ⁵⁸ AU s.a.

⁵⁹ Adomnán, *VSC* i.21, suggests that Baithéne was then *praepositus* of the monastery on Hinba, but in i.30 he is *praepositus* of *Campus Lunge* on Tiree. Similarly, in i.29, Laisrán son of Feradach is in charge of Durrow, but earlier, in i.12, he was accompanying Columba through Ardnamurchan, and he was later to be the third abbot of Iona (AU 605.4). For the participation of the *seniores*, see Bede, *HE* iii.5 (the story about Aidan's predecessor).

⁶⁰ Adomnán, *VSC* i.21; AU 673.6: the voyage of Failbe, abbot of Iona, to Ireland.

example, appears to have visited Northumbria after Iona had sent Aidan to be bishop of the Northumbrians in *c.* 636.⁶¹

By the 630s there is clear evidence that certain monastic churches were gaining a predominant position in the Irish Church. Cummian, in his letter to Ségéne, abbot of Iona, and the hermit Béccán, written in 632 or 633, declared that he had sought the opinion of certain fellow-churchmen, the heads of the churches of Emly, Clonmacnois, Mungret, Clonfertmulloe and either Birr or Clonfert.⁶² These were all major monasteries, of which three were in Munster and two others on its borders. The letter refers to a synod held in Mag Léne, probably the area of good agricultural land in which Durrow lay, and so in the territory of the southern Uí Néill. A few years later, in 640, the pope-elect wrote a letter, also on the paschal question, to a group of northern Irish churchmen.⁶³ The addressees of this letter included both bishops and abbots. In the first half of the seventh century, therefore, bishops at least shared power with the heads of the greater monasteries.

The authority of some abbots, however, extended beyond the kingdoms in which their principal monasteries lay. Adomnán's Life of St Columba makes this evident for Iona. Moreover, the authority which Bede calls a *principatus* in his account of Iona also transcended diocesan boundaries in other cases. When, within a year or two of the Life by Adomnán, Tírechán wrote his work defending the authority of the heir of Patrick, he had to contend with powerful rivals who disputed the control claimed by Armagh over particular churches. Tírechán's premiss was that, because Patrick was the apostle of the Irish, 'the primitive churches' of Ireland should belong to his heir, the bishop of Armagh:

However, my heart within me is intent upon the love due to Patrick, because I see deserters and arch-robbers and the men of war in Ireland – [I see] that they hate the *paruchia* of Patrick, because they have taken away from him that which was his, and they fear that, if the heir of Patrick seeks his *paruchia*, he can make almost the whole island into his *paruchia* . . . because all the primitive churches of Ireland are his . . .⁶⁴

When such churches had passed under the control of others, that was an act of usurpation. Tírechán thus noted of a church called Carrac that

⁶¹ Adomnán, *VSC* i.1, in which Oswald, after he becomes king of the Northumbrians, tells abbot Ségéne the story about a dream in which Columba appeared to him during the night before the battle of Heavensfield. This meeting is likely to have occurred in Northumbria, since Oswald is already king.

⁶² Cummian, *De Controuersia Paschali*, ed. Walsh and Ó Cróinín, pp. 3–7 (on the date), 90–1 (the churchmen consulted by Cummian). ⁶³ Bede, *HE* ii.19. ⁶⁴ Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 18.2–4.

‘the community of Clones has acquired it’.⁶⁵ The church of Ráith Chungai, in the territory of Cenél Conaill, was the resting-place of Bishop Assicus; he was Patrick’s monk, ‘but the community of Colum Cille and the community of Ardstraw claim him’.⁶⁶ Similarly, the church of Dumech was claimed by the community of Clonmacnois, ‘who hold by force many of Patrick’s churches since the last plagues’.⁶⁷ Dumech was adjacent to Elphin, in the territory of the Uí Aillella, one of ‘the three Connachta’, the three principal ruling dynasties of Connaught. The ambitions of Clonmacnois – itself on the eastern bank of the Shannon – were thus extending to a church on the west side of the river and about thirty-six miles upstream. Although, therefore, Clonmacnois itself belonged neither to the kingdom of Uí Aillella nor to the province of Connaught, it claimed possession of churches which did.

According to Tírechán, the acquisitions of Clonmacnois might harm the interests of the churches acquired. When he has made Patrick reach Mag Tóchuir in the north of Inishowen, he tells a story to illustrate yet again the acquisitiveness of the monastery of Clonmacnois in the province of Connaught:

And he went to Mag Tóchuir and made a church there, and in that place a certain bishop of the *genus* Corcu Theimne came to him, from the church of Toch in the land of Temenrige in Cere in the west, a bishop with one sister, Patrick’s monks, and their place (sc. the church of Toch) is in the possession of the *familia* of Cluain (Clonmacnois), and the men of that place groan.⁶⁸

Temenrige was a classic *túath* bishopric of the kind presupposed by *The Bishops’ Synod* in the late fifth or sixth century.⁶⁹ The bishop was from the ruling group, Corcu Theimne, which gave its name to the kingdom. Yet the bishop’s church, Toch, which belonged to him and his sister, was now in the hands of Clonmacnois.

When Tírechán says of the church of Toch that ‘the men of that place groan’, he is probably referring to resentment felt at economic demands made by Clonmacnois upon its subject church. In the course of a description of the position of Tamnach in the kingdom of Uí Aillella, he makes an observation about its relation to another Uí Aillella church, Dumech, and contrasts that relationship with the one claimed by Clonmacnois:

⁶⁵ Ibid., 6.3. ⁶⁶ Ibid., 22.4. ⁶⁷ Ibid., 25.2. ⁶⁸ Ibid., 47.4.

⁶⁹ It appears to have been in the area of the modern town of Castlebar: Mac Neill, *Saint Patrick*, 2nd edn, p. 201; above, chap. 1, n. 125.

After this they placed bishops at the holy church in Tamnach, whom the bishops of Patrick, Brón and Bitheus, ordained. They did not claim anything from the community of Dumech except only an alliance, but the community of Clonmacnois, which holds by force many of Patrick's churches since the most recent plagues, makes its claim.⁷⁰

Tamnach is said to be a free church, founded for Mathona, the sister of Patrick's successor at Armagh, Benignus. It therefore seems to have been a community of nuns associated with an episcopal church.⁷¹ Mathona had come west from Brega to receive the veil from Patrick and the priest Rodanus (Ródán, Rúadán) at Dumech. After the latter's death 'she made an alliance at the grave of the holy Rodanus and their heirs used to feast with each other'.⁷² Although bishops were subsequently established at Tamnach, the heir of Mathona sought only an alliance from the heir of Ródán at Dumech. The dependence suggested by Mathona's reception of the veil from the priest Ródán, when balanced against the superior status of an episcopal church, Tamnach, was appropriately expressed by mutual hospitality. On the other hand, the community of Clonmacnois – without, so it is implied, any justifying relationship between the founders, Cíarán and Ródán – claimed something beyond an alliance, presumably some kind of annual render. The contrast is thus between Tamnach's willingness to respect the status of Dumech by not demanding a render, and the demands made by Clonmacnois which may have threatened its liberty. There is, perhaps, also a further implication, which turns on the contrast, not just between mutual hospitality and a demand for tribute, but between a harmonious relationship of an episcopal church to another church within the same kingdom and an intrusion from outside. Tamnach was an episcopal church within the kingdom of Uí Ailella but some miles to the north-north-west of Dumech. The latter, however, was envisaged by Tírechán as served by a priest rather than a bishop. The restraint of Tamnach in not claiming any form of render from Dumech although both churches belonged to the same kingdom was all the greater because they were of unequal

⁷⁰ Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 25, 1–2, discussed by Swift, 'The Social and Ecclesiastical Background', 120–5.

⁷¹ On its episcopal status, see *The Martyrology of Tallaght*, ed. Best and Lawlor, p. 57 (21 July), *Secht n-epscoib Tamhnaighe*.

⁷² Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 24, 2. For *successores illius* read *successores eorum* with VT² 1102. I take the imperfect *epulabantur* to be referring to a custom said to have obtained before Clonmacnois intervened. Cf. *Vita S. Ruadani*, c. 7, ed. Heist, *Vitae*, p. 167, where Ródán/Rúadán is the saint of Senchue (Shancough, G 82 16), a claim inconsistent with the obit of Ailbe of Senchue in AT and CS (s.a. 541/542).

status, the one being episcopal but the other not. For Tírechán, Clonmacnois was thus intruding itself into another kingdom and disrupting the harmonious alliance between two churches of the Uí Ailella.

Further evidence on the different forms of subjection and alliance comes from the Tripartite Life, largely drawing on a lost Latin text of the late eighth century, approximately a century after Tírechán.⁷³ At the most honourable end of the spectrum of relationships comes that between Armagh and Slane (on the Boyne in the heart of the kingdom of Brega). The basis of this relationship is, as usual, a story, which goes back at least as far as Muirchú in the late seventh century.⁷⁴ According to this tale, the first Easter light was kindled by Patrick at the burial mound of the sons of Fíacc, adjacent to Slane. This was in direct contravention of an edict of Lóegaire, king of Tara, whereby no one might light a fire on that night before it was lit in the king's palace at Tara, the Babylon of the pagan Irish. When Lóegaire had come with his thrice nine chariots and his two druids to seek out Patrick, the holy man was required to come out of the house to appear in the presence of the king. Before Patrick appeared, however, the druids said to the people, 'We are not to rise when he comes, for whosoever rises at his coming will believe afterwards and reverence him.' When Patrick came out of the house, only one man rose before him, Erc son of Daig, 'whose relics are now revered in the city which is called Slane'.⁷⁵ The verdict of the Tripartite Life on this story is expressed in the following prophecy attributed to Patrick and the accompanying explanation:⁷⁶ "Your *cathair* will be of high status, it will be noble upon the earth." And the heir of Patrick is obliged to raise his knee before his (Erc's) heir till Doomsday in return for his humility.' The explanation given here is reminiscent of a passage in the law tract *Críth Gablach* which defines the relative status of the king and bishop of a *túath*.⁷⁷ They are of equal status, according to the tract, but the king should rise up before the bishop as a sign of his respect for the faith, whereas the bishop only raises his knee when the king enters, to signify their equality.⁷⁸ The heir of Patrick, therefore, stands to the heir of Erc as does the bishop to the king; Erc rose before Patrick, and so, it is implied, should his heir rise before Patrick's heir; Patrick's heir

⁷³ L. Bieler, 'Bethu Phátraic. Versuch einer Grundlegung des Verhältnisses der irischen Patriciusviten zu den lateinischen', *Anzeiger der phil.-hist. Klasse der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, 111. Jahrgang 1974, So. 10; repr. in his *Studies on the Life and Legend of St Patrick*, ed. Sharpe, no. xiv. ⁷⁴ Muirchú, *Vita S. Patricii*, i.15-17. ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, i.17. 3. ⁷⁶ VT² 472-5.

⁷⁷ *Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchy, lines 604-6.

⁷⁸ Similarly, in the *Frithfolad* tract the king of the Múscraige raises his knee before the kings of the Uí Fidgenti, Iarlúachra, and Raithlind: *Dál Caladbuig*, § 9.

just raises his knee. Apparently there is no economic demand made by one upon the other, only a carefully judged acknowledgement of relative rank.

In other cases, however, tribute was demanded. This might be almost purely symbolic, in effect a peppercorn rent, as when the church of Down in Ulster was said to have received one annual pig from Nendrum.⁷⁹ It might consist of a hospitality due, as was claimed by the heir of Patrick from several churches of Delbnae Assail:

These are the six: Lugach the priest in Cell Airthir, Columb the priest in Clúain Ernáin, and Meldán of Clúain Crema, and Lugaid macc Eirc in Fordruim, and Cassán the priest in Domnach Mór of Mag nEchnach; five holy men of the *familia* of Patrick in Delbnae Assail, and five dishes for Patrick from them. The sixth was SenCiarán of Saigir.⁸⁰

The Tripartite Life claims that every man belonging to various churches in Airtech in Connaught⁸¹ owed a calf as a sign of reverence to Patrick, the foster-father of Cormac Sníthéne, son of Éndae, until the tribute was remitted by Núadu, abbot of Armagh, 'and that this tribute is not given to them causes the community of Patrick to sigh'.⁸² Here again the tribute has its justifying story.

It was not, in general, the job of either Tírechán or the Tripartite Life to tell their readers only incontrovertible truths; often what was told was what needed to be defended or what might perhaps be claimed. These passages do not, therefore, show that the churches named actually paid the tribute or the hospitality dues mentioned. But they do show what rights the more powerful churches were interested in claiming. Moreover the rights were hereditary. The service due from the churches in Airtech was a *doíre*, a servility, which had to be paid until Núadu remitted it. In the case of the church of Imblech nÓnonn, Tírechán made the hereditary nature of the obligation clear by means of a prophecy he put into the mouth of Patrick: 'And he [Patrick] went to Imblech nÓnon, and Patrick said to him [Óno]: "Thy seed will be blessed, and from thy seed will come priests of the Lord and worthy *principes* owing alms to me and remaining your heirs."⁸³ The lineage of Óno will be ecclesiastical. It will retain its own independence as a kindred, since the *principes*, the heads of

⁷⁹ VT² 426–7. The general point is not affected if, as I think is very likely, the claim was exaggerated in this instance.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 816–21. Clúain Crema is probably the modern Clonmellon (< Clúain Meldáin), grid ref. N 65 68; its importance is suggested by AU 752.11, 'Mors Osbrain anchorite 7 et episcopi Cluana Creamha', if this is the same Cluain Crema.

⁸¹ Around Tibohine, Co. Roscommon (M 67 92).
⁸² VT² 887–92. Núadu died in 812; the context of the story may be his visit to Connaught in 811 with the Law of Patrick and his casket: AU 811.1; 812.4.

⁸³ Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 21. 2.

the church, will remain Óno's heirs even though they owe alms to the heir of Patrick. Armagh seems here to be offering a fairly privileged subordination in which the independent cohesion of the kindred of Imblech nÓnonn will be respected, even though a rent, described as alms, is due. Since Tírechán was unepiscopal enough to describe the *gens* to which Óno and his brother belonged as 'the Kindred of Dogshit', it is highly likely that, in his day, the church of Imblech had not accepted the position on offer from Armagh.⁸⁴

Such rents needed to be collected; and Armagh, at least, had officers to perform this task. The annals record the death in 814 of Feidilmid, abbot of Kilmoone and *máer* of Brega for Patrick, a distinguished anchorite and an excellent *scriba*.⁸⁵ *Máer* (from Latin *maior*) was used, together with *rechtaire*, for officers who looked after the local interests of great churches and kings, and, in particular, collected dues. Sometimes these dues clearly took the form of hospitality or food-renders, which could only be collected by someone coming to the place in question. When, therefore, Armagh appointed a local churchman to such an office, as in the case of Feidilmid, the position may have entitled him to enjoy some of the dues owed to Armagh. Yet renders could also take the form of payments in silver, which could be transmitted by a *rechtaire* or *máer* to Armagh. Moreover, the local officer of a great church may also have been called on to manage its local property. Subordinate churches could even be exchanged. When Patrick was journeying west across the midlands, he is said by the Tripartite Life to have blessed a child, Lonán macc Senaig, who was later to be buried in a church named Caill Huallech. This church was seized by Clonmacnois but was subsequently handed over to the monastery of Clonard in exchange for Cell Lothair in Brega and Clúain Alad Deirg further west.⁸⁶

The evidence, then, suggests a distinction.⁸⁷ On the one hand, there is the relationship depicted by Adomnán as obtaining between Iona and Hinba or Mag Lunge on Tiree: one monastery is subject to another; that subjection is shown by the subordination of its head (*praepositus* or *propositus* rather than *abbas*); the abbot of Iona has the power to appoint and to supervise the *praepositus*. On the other hand, there is the relationship which one can compare to later medieval monastic appropriation of churches: a local church belongs to a major church, and the point of this relationship is not the subordination of one monastic community to

⁸⁴ Contrast *VT*² 1051, Corcu Ochland, for the same group.

⁸⁵ AU 814.1.

⁸⁶ *VT*² 832–40.

⁸⁷ Cf. Sharpe, 'Some Problems', pp. 246–7.

another but the taking of some variety of rent. It is implied that the subordinate church has an income in excess of its minimum needs, and the controlling church can thus take the surplus.

Yet a third situation is implied by the Lives of Mo Lua moccu Óche of Clonfertmulloe. Mo Lua moccu Óche was the founder and patron saint of Clonfertmulloe on the boundary between the Loígsi and Munster and Drumsnat (Druim Snechtae) in Fernmag (Co. Monaghan).⁸⁸ In the earlier of his two Lives he is said to visit his native kingdom, that of the Uí Fídgente to the south of Limerick.⁸⁹ There he asked the king, Fáelán mac Dimma, for land on which to build a monastery; to which the resourceful king replied that, if he remained among his own people, his monastery would be small: 'A churchman does not have honour in his own land, and your kindred, by itself, rejecting foreigners [*peregrini*], will always rule in your monastery. But if you establish a monastery for yourself in *peregrinatione*, your monastery will be great and will be honoured by all.' The king is apparently suggesting that, if Mo Lua establishes a church well away from the Corco Óche and their overlords, Uí Fídgente, and if he sets up a rule of succession which allows for anyone, of whatever kindred (including *peregrini*), to become abbot, his monastery will then be honoured by all. Such a policy no doubt suited best a monastery such as Clonfertmulloe, situated close to the boundary between Leinster and Munster, and not far from the boundary with the lands of the Uí Néill; but even so, the king had a point, and his advice encapsulates very well the rule of succession found at Clonmacnois.⁹⁰ But that was a major monastery on the borders of a minor kingdom, Delbnae Bethra; for lesser churches, performing a pastoral role in the centre of a kingdom, it might be more prudent to adopt the scheme laid out in *Córus Béscnai*, providing for a sequence of rights of succession inhering in the kindreds of the patron, the *érlam*, the land, the *manaig* and so on.⁹¹ This scheme put pressure on defined groups to produce someone worthy of the headship of the church. The scheme could readily be used, for example, by the bishop of a small kingdom who wished to fill a vacancy in a minor church. This is especially the case for the scheme in its original form, which allowed that the kindred of the *érlam* might lose their prior right if they failed to produce a worthy candidate within a set

⁸⁸ Clonfertmulloe is s 233 901; the *Vita Prior S. Lugidi seu Moluae*, ed. Heist, *Vitae*, p. 138, cc. 33-4, shows that the land belonged to Loígsi. ⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 137, c. 30.

⁹⁰ J. Ryan, 'The Abbatial Succession at Clonmacnois', in J. Ryan (ed.), *Féilsgríbhinn Eóin Mhic Néill: Essays and Studies Presented to Professor Eóin Mac Néill* (Dublin, 1940), pp. 490-507.

⁹¹ For a discussion, see Charles-Edwards, 'Érlam: The Patron-Saint of an Irish Church'.

number of years. The advice of the king of Uí Fídgente to Mo Lua would work very well, therefore, if the church were so great that its headship would always attract strong candidates, but not otherwise.

The way different rules of succession could fit different circumstances is illustrated by Mo Lua's other principal church, Druim Snechta (Drumsnat, Co. Monaghan).⁹² It lay within Fernmag ('Alder-plain'), the territory of the Uí Chremthainn, one of the principal royal lineages of the Airgíalla. The siting of Mo Lua's church at Druim Snechta is probably explained by an early origin-legend of the Corco Óche (probably c. 700 to judge by the language) which says that one branch of Corco Óche migrated to the kingdom of Fernmag.⁹³ In that instance, therefore, Mo Lua's membership of the *gens* of the Corco Óche may have been crucial, whereas at Clonfertmulloe it was irrelevant. The contrast holds even if the association of the Corco Óche with Fernmag was an invention designed to explain the foundation of Druim Snechta: the founder's membership of the *gens* would still be a central fact in the monastery's perception of itself. There is no suggestion that Druim Snechta was subject to Clonfertmulloe; instead the association appears to have been one of alliance.

The power, wealth and wide connections of the great monasteries does not imply that they had replaced the episcopal churches. The vernacular laws of the early eighth century are at one with the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* of 716 × 725 in placing the bishop at the centre of the Irish Church. Another prescriptive text, *Riagail Phátraic*, 'The Rule of Patrick', preserved in a largely legal manuscript, provides valuable detailed confirmation of the continuing vigour of episcopal authority.⁹⁴ There is no way to date it apart from its language, which is standard Old Irish of the eighth or early ninth century.⁹⁵ Its concern is to uphold the right and the duty of the bishop to provide proper pastoral care for the *tuath*, and the corresponding duty of his people to seek episcopal confirmation, 'for the fullness of the Holy Spirit does not come upon him who . . . does not go under the hand of a bishop after baptism'. The bishop is also, more specifically, to act as spiritual director for all heads of churches and all secular lords.

⁹² On or near the site of the modern Drumsnat church, H 61 31, near Drumsnat Bridge. The *Vita II S. Lugidi* was written at and for the monastery of Druim Snechtae: Heist, *Vitae*, 382–8.

⁹³ 'The Laud Genealogies', ed. Meyer, 307.26; 308.11.

⁹⁴ *CIH* 2129.6–2130.37; ed. and tr. J. G. O'Keefe, *Ériu*, 1 (1904), pp. 216–24. Its importance was made clear by P. J. Corish, *The Christian Mission* (Dublin, 1972), p. 34.

⁹⁵ E.g. *-roisel*, *CIH* 2129.39; *ro-só*, 2130.29; *dligid* is neuter, 2130.36; *manibet óga a frithfolaid*, 2130.10, is very probably to be read *maní bat óga a frithfolad* with the short neuter plural ending *frithfolad*.

Good evidence exists, therefore, for two claims, apparently opposed to each other: both that the Irish Church was episcopal and that it was peculiarly monastic in that the authority of abbots might override that of bishops. The problem is to know how to determine the limits within which these two views are correct. To this end, the argument will be pursued on several fronts: first, the geographical scope of episcopal authority and related questions of episcopal status; secondly, the specific cases of Coleraine, Armoy and Connor in the north-east, of Sleaty and Kildare in Leinster, and of Aghaboe and Domnach Mór Roigni in Osraige; thirdly, the issue of the relationship between episcopal status and that of abbots, scholars and anchorites; and, fourthly, the situation in the province of Brega.

The Rule of Patrick does not suggest that there was a scarcity of bishops. Quite the contrary: the bishop with whom the text is principally concerned is 'the chief bishop of the *túath*'.⁹⁶ This phrasing is borne out when, speaking of the distinctive functions of the bishop, it says: 'For any *túath* and any [ruling] kindred which does not have bishops to discharge these functions, the rule of their religion and their faith perishes.' Even a single *túath* may have bishops rather than a single bishop. Other texts confirm the notion that there were different ranks of bishop just as there were different ranks of church.⁹⁷ Bishops of higher status might possess a wider authority than 'the chief bishop' of a *túath*. The eighth-century legal tract *Uraicecht Becc* mentions 'a supreme noble bishop' who is equal in status to the king of a whole province such as Munster and also to 'the head of a great monastery such as Cork or Emly'.⁹⁸ A text about refusal of hospitality to clergy refers to 'a bishop of bishops'.⁹⁹

That there were indeed such superior bishops is borne out by some entries in the annals. Usually the annals, for reasons which will be discussed later, refer to bishops either by name only or by the church to which they were attached, 'Bishop Colmán son of Rimid' or 'Dímma Dub, bishop of Connor'.¹⁰⁰ This makes it very difficult to know what may have been the extent of their authority. There are, however, a few exceptions. Under the year 665 the Annals of Ulster have the following entry, which is unusual in its phrasing, perhaps because it is recording

⁹⁶ In AU 840.1, Vikings from Lough Neagh carried off numerous captives from the church of Louth, among whom were 'bishops and priests and scholars'; cf. the Scottish example of a chief bishop of a kingdom: Tuathal son of Artgus, 'primepscop Fortrenn 7 abbas Dúin Caillenn', AU 865.6. ⁹⁷ Compare the small churches and great churches of *CIH* 2130.19–20.

⁹⁸ *CIH* 2282 compared with 1618.

⁹⁹ *Canones Hibernenses*, v. 9 (ed. Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, p. 174). Cf. Etchingham, 'Bishops in the Early Irish Church', 53–5. ¹⁰⁰ AU 659, 660.

the effect of plague: 'Blaimacc of Tethbae, Óengus of the Ulstermen, Manchán of Líath, bishops and abbots, and innumerable others, died.' Manchán was the founder of Líath Mancháin, Lemanaghan in Co. Offaly, and the entry thus identifies him by the name of his monastery. The other two are, however, identified by the names of kingdoms or peoples; they must therefore be the bishops referred to in the entry. Tethbae (approximately Co. Longford) was divided by Tírechán's time into two kingdoms, Northern and Southern Tethbae, with their principal churches at Granard and Ardagh respectively. Ardagh in Southern Tethbae, the kingdom of Cenél Maini, had close links with the cult of Brigit of Kildare.¹⁰¹ Both Ardagh and Granard were episcopal churches. Blaimacc, therefore, probably had his see at one of these places; he may have been a bishop of bishops over the whole of Tethbae, but since the annals sometimes reserve that name for Southern Tethbae, that is not certain. Óengus of the Ulstermen is an even more intriguing figure. According to Muirchú, the Ulstermen or Ulaid were confined to Mag nInis, the fertile region around Downpatrick, and to the Ards peninsula.¹⁰² In spite of the status of Downpatrick as the resting-place of Patrick,¹⁰³ the principal episcopal church of the Ulstermen in the seventh century seems to have been Nendrum, situated on an island in Strangford Lough. Crónán, who died in 643 as bishop of Nendrum, appears to have been one of the leading churchmen of the northern half of Ireland addressed by the pope-elect John in 640.¹⁰⁴ At the end of the century we have the obit of Cumméne of the Mugdornai, a people in what is now the southern part of Co. Monaghan.¹⁰⁵ Both Tírechán and the Tripartite Life imply that Domnach Maigen was the episcopal church of this kingdom.¹⁰⁶

After 700 there are no more annalistic references to bishops of Irish peoples or kingdoms until the tenth century, after the terminal date of

¹⁰¹ *Bethu Brigte*, § 30; cf. *Vita I*, § 29.

¹⁰² Muirchú, *Vita S. Patricii*, i.11.3; i.12.4; ii.11.2; ii.13. Cf. *VT*² 2612, 'hi tírib Ulud [i. i Maig Inis]'.

¹⁰³ Muirchú, *Vita S. Patricii*, ii.11.2; or, more particularly, Saul, as in the notes following Tírechán's, *Collectanea*, Bieler's c. 55, p. 164.

¹⁰⁴ See Plummer's note to Bede, *HE* ii.19; other bishops of Nendrum include Crídán, *ob.* 639; Cumméne, *ob.* 659. Bangor, which was reckoned as belonging to the Ards, was ruled by abbots rather than by bishops.

¹⁰⁵ AU 696.5; since he 'rested', he is unlikely to have been a secular ruler of the Mugdornai.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 50.2. Bieler's translation should be corrected as follows: 'Having left Armagh, he came to the Maudgorni and ordained Victoricus as bishop of Domnach Maigen; and he founded there a great church.' For the identity of 'the great church' as Domnach Maigen, the modern Donaghmoynne (H 85 06), see *VT*² 2138.

the Chronicle of Ireland. Then in the Annals of Ulster, and only there, there is another sequence of such entries.¹⁰⁷

AU 922.1 Máel Póil son of Ailill, *suí* and bishop of SílnÁeda Sláne.

AU 924.4 Mochta, bishop of the Uí Néill and *sacart* of Armagh, rested in peace.

AU 947.5 Cathusach son of Ailche, bishop of Cenél nEógain, dies.

AU 969.1 Eógan son of Cléirech, bishop of the Connachta.

AU 993.5 Máel Finnián descendant of Óenach, heir of Feichíne and bishop of the peoples (*tíatha*) of the Luigni, rested in Christ Jesus.

These obits occur more than a century after the onset of the Viking period and demonstrate that an episcopal organisation was not destroyed by their attacks.¹⁰⁸ They compel the historian to decide whether the silence of the annals for the eighth and ninth centuries is a consequence of the way episcopal obits were described or reflects a real change in ecclesiastical organisation.¹⁰⁹

An example which helps to explain the threats to episcopal churches is the relationship between the churches of Coleraine, Armoy and Connor, discussed above.¹¹⁰ Armoy and Coleraine suffered along with the kingdoms of which they were the episcopal churches; military defeat led directly to the imposition of inferior client status upon the kingdom, and, as a consequence, to the demotion of the episcopal church to non-episcopal status and the transfer of many of its lands to major churches outside Eilne or Dál Ríata. Both Armoy and Coleraine thus exhibited the effects of military expansion and associated ecclesiastical aggrandisement.

The Testament of Áed of Sleaty (in the modern Co. Carlow) illustrates how similar effects might flow from an attempt to forestall such aggrandisement.¹¹¹ Áed made a solemn bequest of his church and his kindred to Patrick not long before 688. The timing of this move suggests that it was made in response to the threat posed by the church of Kildare

¹⁰⁷ This group of entries is discussed by Etchingham, 'Bishops in the Early Irish Church', 57–9.

¹⁰⁸ Corish, *The Christian Mission* (Dublin, 1972), p. 86: 'All the evidence suggests that they [the non-monastic clergy] did not survive the Viking centuries.'

¹⁰⁹ A possible concealed example is AU 867.2, where we have a series of ecclesiastical obits of the form 'X of Y, bishop', e.g. 'Robartach Finnglaissi episcopus 7 scriba', or 'X, abbot of Y'; these are brought to a close by the following: 'Cormacc nepos Liathain, scriba 7 episcopus 7 ancorita'. It is very unusual for a scribe not to be identified by place; this may, however, be a kingdom (AU 725.4: Munster), and it is therefore possible that Cormac was scribe of the Munster kingdom of Uí Liatháin as well as a member of its ruling lineage and its bishop. ¹¹⁰ Above, pp. 55–61.

¹¹¹ Byrne, 'A Note on Trim and Sletty', pp. 316–19; Doherty, 'The Cult of St Patrick', 75–8.

some thirty miles to the north. At the time the king of Leinster was Bran mac Conaill of the Uí Dúnlainge dynasty, whose oldest lands lay to the north of Sleaty but to the south of Kildare.¹¹² Sleaty, however, was in the vassal kingdom of Uí Bairrche Tíre, and the likelihood is that the Uí Dúnlainge, who had recently made themselves masters and patrons of Kildare, seemed to Áed to be in a position to threaten the independence of Sleaty. He therefore subjected his church to the distant Armagh in the hope that Armagh's authority would be much less burdensome than Kildare's might have been. In this case, therefore, the subjection was defensive not offensive, and was effected by a legal instrument rather than by violence.¹¹³

A third example comes from the eighth-century Life of St Cainnech of Aghaboe. Cainnech was a major saint, said to have been a friend of Columba, but unlike Columba in that he came of humble parentage. The ecclesiastical network which looked to him as patron came to be very wide, but his chief church was Aghaboe (Achad Bó) in the far north of the kingdom of Osraige.¹¹⁴ At the other end of the kingdom lay the territory, and probable sub-kingdom, of Mag Roigni around the modern Kells and Callan. This was the district of Osraige that Tirechán made Patrick visit, and he was followed by the Tripartite Life.¹¹⁵ This suggests that Mag Roigni may have been the leading kingdom within the over-kingdom of Osraige, and therefore that Aghaboe suffered a handicap in terms of secular influence in that it was remote from the main seat of power. The Life of Cainnech, however, has an answer.¹¹⁶ Colmán son of Feradach (father of the Scandlán in whom Columba took a personal interest) was king of Osraige.¹¹⁷ He was also Cainnech's friend and ally, 'because he had given much worldly wealth to Cainnech in exchange for heaven'. On one occasion the king was besieged in his fort by his enemies, Máelgarb and Máel Odur, who were intent on depriving him of the kingship. Cainnech set out to the rescue from Aghaboe, but needed two miracles to get him to his destination in time. When he arrived in Mag Roigni he was met by 'a fat man, the head of the church

¹¹² Tirechán, *Collectanea*, 12.2, on Maistiú (around Mullaghmast, Co. Kildare, cf. Mullaghmast Ho., s 77 96). ¹¹³ For the *audacht* see *Bechbretha*, pp. 159–60.

¹¹⁴ Aghaboe is s 32 85; for an example of a church of Cainnech far from Aghaboe see his *reclé* (subsidiary church) at Cell Rígmónaid (St Andrews): *Fél.*² Notes, 11 October.

¹¹⁵ Tirechán, *Collectanea*, 51; *VT*² 2273–9.

¹¹⁶ *Vita S. Cainnechi*, c. 46, ed. Heist, *Vitae*, p. 194. (There is no need to suppose, with Heist, something missing after *magnum*; the Latin reflects the Irish idiom *mór di*. In the later version in Plummer, *Vitae*, i.166, Colmán gives *multas villas*.)

¹¹⁷ *Ob.* 605; cf. Adomnán, *VSC* i.12, and below pp. 488–9.

of Domnach Mór Roigni, an enemy of the king and envious of his position'. This cleric attempted to persuade Cainnech that he would arrive too late but was brushed aside with a prophecy that he himself, rather than the king, would shortly die. Their modes of travel revealed the opposing allegiances of the two churchmen. The ascetic Cainnech was travelling in a chariot lent to him by a woman only because it was necessary if he were to rescue the king; the fat cleric travelled in a chariot in the normal course of events.¹¹⁸ Cainnech's prophecy was rapidly fulfilled: as the cleric was passing through the gate of Domnach Mór Roigni part of the structure fell on his head.¹¹⁹ Cainnech, however, entered the king's fort unharmed, even though it was completely surrounded and had been set on fire, rescued the king and set him down at a safe distance, remarking:

Wait here. You may be on your own today, but it will be different tomorrow. First, three men will come to you in this place, then three hundred, and on the third day you will again be king of all Osraige.

In spite of the remoteness of Aghaboe, Cainnech had saved the king. It is not surprising that the later cathedral church of Osraige would be Cell Chainnig, 'Cainnech's church', Kilkenny.¹²⁰

The interest of the story lies partly in its implications for the relationship between the king of Osraige, his principal local church, Domnach Mór Roigni, and Cainnech of Aghaboe. The king triumphed over his rivals, but Cainnech triumphed over 'the fat *princeps* of Domnach Mór Roigni'. The leading church of Osraige would not be the old *domnach* church, the principal church of the principal kingdom and very probably an episcopal church. Instead it would be a monastery, whose *patronus* was the friend of God and of the king, able to work miracles by the power of God so as to protect the king from his rivals. The friendship of Cainnech, it should be noted, had been bought: much worldly wealth had been given to buy heaven. But the fat *princeps* of Domnach Mór Roigni could not have given heaven in exchange for all the wealth of Mammon; he was no friend of God or king. This *domnach* church, probably founded about a century before Cainnech settled down at Aghaboe, declined because of the standard link between the acknowledged holiness of a monastic *patronus*, the consequent power of his prayers, and

¹¹⁸ Contrast Adomnán, *VSC* ii.43; Bede, *HE* iii.5 (Aidan), iv.3 (Chad).

¹¹⁹ The compound *dorncleth* (apparently 'hand' + 'house-post') is not registered in *DIL*.

¹²⁰ According to Hogan, *Onom.*, s.v., the first certain attestation of Cell Chainnig is in the Annals of the Four Masters, ed. and tr. J. O'Donovan, *Annála Rioghachta Éireann* (Dublin, 1851), 1146.

kings whose wealth was matched by their insecurity in the face of dynastic rivalry.

The story in the Life does not set the monastic saint against a non-monastic episcopal church. Cainnech's clerical opponent was a *princeps*, head of 'the great *domnach* of Roigne'. It is not said whether he was bishop, priest or of a lower order. What mattered to this hagiographer was the conflict between churches, not the fortunes of bishops as opposed to abbots. Aghaboe itself may well have had its bishop. What he asserted, however, was that the fortunes of churches and of dynasties were intertwined and that there was an intimate connection between the holiness of the monastic patron and the ability of the king to triumph over his enemies in battle.

(II) SCHOLARS, BISHOPS AND ABBOTS

Some common features of obits in the annals are illustrated by the following examples:

Bishop Crunnmáel, abbot of Cell Mór Enir, rested (AU 770.12).

Joseph, descendant of Foiléne, a scholar (*sapiens*), abbot of Birr (AU 785.1).

In both cases an individual has two titles, only one of which, 'abbot', is linked to a church. This contrast between 'bishop', which is often not linked to a church, and 'abbot', which always is, reappears when we compare titles denoting intellectual pre-eminence, *sapiens* and *scriba*. These terms I shall translate 'scholar' and 'scribe'; but, as we shall see, the *scriba* is not particularly concerned with writing manuscripts; rather, the term has its biblical sense, as in 'the scribes and the pharisees'.¹²¹

Joseph, abbot of Birr, was no more described as 'scholar of Birr', than Crunnmáel was 'bishop of Cell Mór Enir'. The description 'scholar of such-and-such a place' occurs occasionally, but it is considerably less common even than 'bishop of such-and-such a place'.¹²² Yet there are only six (out of approximately seventy) entries in the Annals of Ulster up to 911 in which the title 'scribe' is not attached to a place.¹²³ The contrast may be pursued a little further. A frequent type of ecclesiastical obit

¹²¹ The *scriba* is well illustrated in a Latin Life of Finnian of Clonard, post-Norman but reworking earlier material: 'scriba doctissimus ad docendum legem mandatorum Dei', *Vita Finniani*, c. 34 (ed. Heist, *Vitae*, p. 106). The scribe in the modern sense is described as a *scriptor* in the eighth-century *Vita S. Albei*, c. 39 (ed. Heist, *Vitae*, p. 127). Cf. M. Richter, 'The Personnel of Learning in Early Medieval Ireland', in Ní Chatháin and Richter (eds.), *Irland und Europa im früheren Mittelalter*, 275–308.

¹²² For example, AU 731.8: 'Faeldobur Becc sapiens Fobair' (Fore, Co. Westmeath).

¹²³ AU 745.5; 796.1 (Colgu); 817.1; 843.7; 867.2; 874.1 (Cormac).

Table 6.1. *Offices and places*

<i>Titles regularly attached to places</i>	<i>Titles often not attached to places</i>
abbas	episcopus
secundus abbas/secndap	sapiens
sacerdos/sacart	anchorita
princeps	
dominatrix	
scriba	

is the bare personal name followed by the name of the church to which the person belongs:

Do Bécóc of Clúain Ard rested (AU 690.4).¹²⁴

A variant is the following:

Cúanu of Louth, a scholar and a bishop, rested (AU 825.1).

Here ‘scholar’ and ‘bishop’ are not attached to the place even though the place is mentioned and there is no other title which might be so attached. Following this lead, we may arrange ecclesiastical titles according to whether annalists usually attach them to places or not. One clue to the relationship between bishop and abbot, therefore, may be the parallel relationship between scholar and scribe.

The *scriba* of the annals was the scriptural scribe, that is, someone learned in the law; moreover, the law in question was not any law but the law of the Bible in particular. According to a colophon in a Paris manuscript of the *Hibernensis*, the two scholars who compiled that text were Ruben of Dairinis, a church on the Blackwater in Munster, and Cú Chuimne of Iona.¹²⁵ In the colophon, therefore, they were identified by name and church. Their obits in the annals, however, were as follows:

Rubin mac Connadh, the scribe of Munster (AU 725. 4).

Cú Chuimne the scholar (*sapiens*) died (AU 747. 5).

The nature of their learning seems not to have been different: the law of the *Hibernensis* rests principally on the Bible, only secondarily on the decrees of councils and synods. Similarly, Cumméne the Tall, a *sapiens*,¹²⁶ is likely to be the Cummian who composed a penitential and may also be the author of the letter to Ségéne, abbot of Iona, and the hermit Béccán on the paschal question.¹²⁷ The arguments of the letter

¹²⁴ This was the patron saint of Toureen Peakaun (= Cluain Ard Mo Béccóc), s 005 285.

¹²⁵ R. Thurneysen, ‘Zur irischen Kanonensammlung’, *ZCP*, 6 (1908), 1–5. ¹²⁶ AU 662.

¹²⁷ Cummian, *De Controversia Paschali*, pp. 12–15.

Table 6.2. *Scribae and sapientes in the Annals of Ulster up to 911*

	<i>scribae</i>	<i>sapientes</i>
–700	1	7
701–50	12	12
751–800	8	18
801–50	23	5
851–911	25	5

range widely but are principally scriptural and patristic. Another *sapiens* was Aldfrith, king of Northumbria (685–705), who was praised by Bede – the greatest of all biblical scholars in the British Isles in the early Middle Ages and himself described by the Irish as *sapiens* – as ‘most learned in the scriptures’.¹²⁸ There was an overlap between the *scribae* and the *sapientes*: Lochéne Menn was a *sapiens* in his obit but in the genealogies he is described as ‘the best *scriba* of the Irish’.¹²⁹ *Sapientia*, then, was typically a Christian and biblically based learning; and an individual was learned irrespective of his attachment to a church. The *scriba*, however, appears to have been a *sapiens* who performed a function in a particular church.

In the annals the distinction between *scriba* and *sapiens* is partly chronological, as tables 6.2 and 6.3 show. Obit of *sapientes* are much rarer in the ninth century than in the eighth, whereas the frequency of *scribae* increases after 800, and even in the eighth century there is a contrast between 701–750 and 751–800 (table 6.2).

In the sphere of learning, the annals apparently began by describing men predominantly in terms of high status irrespective of the church in which they were active, and subsequently tended more and more towards describing them in terms of the office they held within a particular church. A person of the status of Ailerán, possibly of Clonard, who died in 665, was almost certainly the outstanding scholar in his monastery at the time, but he was described in his obit simply as *sapiens* without any reference to Clonard or any other house.¹³⁰ Probably he was *scriba*

¹²⁸ AU 704.3 (a year early); Bede, *HE* iv.26/24, v. 12; AU 735. 7 (H²). AT’s entry corresponding to AU’s 704 obit for Aldfrith describes him as *ecnaidh*, but in Bede’s obit in AT the Latin *sapiens* is retained. ¹²⁹ AU 696.4; *CGH* i.152 (142 b 41).

¹³⁰ Kenney, *The Sources*, no. 107; Sharpe, ‘*Vitae S. Brigitae*: The Oldest Texts’, *Peritia*, 1 (1982), pp. 100–1, rightly points out that the evidence for placing Ailerán at Clonard is thin.

of a monastery, but that was not the title given to him by the annalist. Ailerán also provides evidence for the vernacular equivalent of *sapiens*; the list of rulers of Ireland after conversion given in the Book of Leinster, itself compiled largely from the annals, translates Ailerán *sapiens* by Ailerán *ecnae*.¹³¹ *Ecnae* is also the term used in the legal status-lists for ecclesiastical scholars in general, but *suí* or *suí litre* is used for those of highest rank.¹³²

In the eighth century, as we have seen, *sapiens* is not usually explicitly associated by the annalist with a particular church, whereas *scriba* is. In the ninth century, however, most obits for both *sapientes* and *scribae* contained an indirect attachment to a church, such as ‘Flann son of Cellach, abbot of Finglas, scribe and anchorite and bishop, died suddenly’ (AU 812.1). The title *scriba* is not itself shown as attached to the church, Finglas, other than indirectly, *via* Flann’s abbacy. This was a consequence of a more general change in annalistic practice. In the eighth century it was normal for a person to be given only one title conferring high rank: he was a bishop or an anchorite or a *sapiens* or a *scriba*. In the ninth century, however, many churchmen were given a range of titles: someone might be bishop and anchorite and *scriba*.

Among these multiple sources of high rank in the ninth-century annals, one stands out from the rest: the headship of a church (whether as abbot or as *princeps*). A bishop derived his rank from his consecration; in the usual Irish conception he conferred high status on the church to which he was attached; the church did not make him any more high-ranking than he already was. Even if he was a ‘bishop of bishops’ he derived this rank from his province-wide authority and not from being bishop of, say, Clonmacnois. With the head of a church, however, the reverse was the true: he was ‘a superior head’, an *excelsus princeps* or *ollam mórchathrach*, because his church was important, not because he had undergone a special rite which gave him high rank. If, then, the annals described someone as bishop, *scriba* and head of a church, it was logical to name the church in relation to his headship and not to his episcopacy or his position as a *scriba*. Once, therefore, the annals acquired the habit of signalling more than one source of high rank, the title of *scriba*

¹³¹ LL i.96 (line 3069).

¹³² CIH 585.34–586.29; 2279.16–35; cf. 1123.35: ‘Ni ba hegna nad coir coiccerta canoin’, ‘He who does not rightly interpret scripture may not be a scholar’; 1124.26 shows that the *mac ecnai*, like the *mac ríg* etc., had status in virtue of his parentage; the same is implied by BN IX in *Uraicecht na Riar*, ed. Breatnach, p. 46; both thus make the *ecnai* a hereditary learned order, similar to the poets and nobles.

Table 6.3. Scribes *and* sapientes: *AU* figures compared with inclusive figures

AU FIGURES												
	<i>scribae</i>						<i>sapientes</i>					
	<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>(B)</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>(C)</i>		<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>(B)</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>(C)</i>	
−700	0	0	0	1	0	1	6	1	0	0	0	7
701–750	1	1	0	9	1	12	8	2	0	1	1	12
751–800	1	4	1	2	0	8	9	5	0	4	0	18
801–850	2	15	1	5	0	23	0	5	0	0	0	5
851–911	2	21	0	2	0	25	0	4	0	1	0	5
	6	41	2	19	1	69	23	17	0	6	1	47
INCLUSIVE FIGURES (including not just AU but also AT and CS)												
	<i>scribae</i>						<i>sapientes</i>					
	<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>(B)</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>(C)</i>		<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>(B)</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>(C)</i>	
−700		0	0	0	1	0	6	1	0	0	0	7
701–750	1	1	0	9	1	12	8	4	0	1	2	15
751–800	1	4	1	2	0	8	10	5	0	4	0	19
801–850	2	15	1	5	0	23	0	5	0	0	0	5
851–911	2	22	1	2	0	27	0	6	1	1	0	8
	6	42	3	19	1	71	24	21	1	6	2	54

naturally became, at least in appearance, detached from any particular church. The norm was, for example, ‘Cormac son of Suibne, abbot of Clonard, *scriba* and bishop, rested in peace’ (AU 830.2) rather than ‘Cormac son of Suibne, *scriba* of Clonard, abbot and bishop, rested in peace.’ This same fundamental change – from a single declared source of high status to more than one – has a further consequence. It was now easier to describe someone as both a *sapiens* and a *scriba*. Examples of such entries exist, although they are not common.¹³³ Just when the annalistic context of the two titles, *sapiens* and *scriba*, became otherwise indistinguishable, they could be shown to be distinct by being juxtaposed in a single obit. In table 6.3, A stands for annal-entries which simply describe someone as *sapiens* or *scriba* without mention of a church; B stands for an entry such as AU 812.1, ‘Flann son of Cellach, abbot of Finglas, *scriba* and anchorite and bishop, died suddenly.’ Here Flann is attached to a church but not directly *qua* scholar. C, on the other hand,

¹³³ AU 831.4; 846.1; 888.3.

stands for an entry in which someone is directly attached to a church *qua* scholar. (B) and (C) signify attachment to a kingdom.

The function of the *scriba*, as it appears in the *Hibernensis*, required close knowledge of the Bible but also involved – perhaps not always, but certainly often – acting as an ecclesiastical judge. Churches of any importance had scribes who were also described as judges.¹³⁴ Two Irish canonical texts show very clearly how the Irish reckoned ecclesiastical rank.¹³⁵ The first is described as an ‘Irish synod’, namely a synod of the party within the Irish Church which remained attached to the traditional Celtic Easter;¹³⁶ the text therefore belongs to the period *c.* 630–716. The second is not ascribed to a synod at all. Both concern the application to clerics of aspects of the secular law pertaining to status. The first deals with physical injuries in which blood is shed. Clause 1 equates the status of the bishop, the *excelsus princeps* (‘noble head of a church’), and the *scriba*. The bishop’s compensation for bloodshed is twice that of the priest. The second text deals with the offence known as *esáin*, ‘driving away’, namely refusal of hospitality due to the person rejected. Here a bishop is equated in rank to an *excelsus princeps*, a scribe, an anchorite and a judge (probably, in this context, an ecclesiastical judge, and therefore a *sapiens*). Above all of these, however, there is a ‘bishop of bishops’ whose compensation corresponds to that of an overking. The word *princeps* is often used in the annals: it is a more inclusive term than ‘abbot’, but may be employed instead of ‘abbot’ more or less at random. The head of Cell Mór Enir is an *abbas* in 770, a *princeps* in 812; in 818 he is an *airchinnech* (the vernacular equivalent to *princeps*) but has a *secnap*, ‘second abbot’ or ‘prior’.¹³⁷ The *excelsus princeps* (also called the *princeps magnus*) is, therefore, the head of a major church.¹³⁸ The abbots of Iona, Clonmacnois, Clonard and Bangor were doubtless *excelsi principes*, equivalent in status to an ordinary bishop but inferior to a ‘bishop of bishops’.

We may now take a second look at the annals and at the lists of titles which either are or are not regularly linked with churches. If we allow that an abbot of a church likely to be recorded in the annals was also likely to be an *excelsus princeps*, there will be persons of the same high rank on both sides of the divide (table 6.4).

¹³⁴ *Hib.* xx.2 (10 *civitates*; 10 *iudices*, where *civitates* are major churches); xxi.1, 2.

¹³⁵ *Canones Hibernenses*, iv and v (ed. and tr. Bieler, *Irish Penitentials*, pp. 170–4).

¹³⁶ Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, pp. 125–31.

¹³⁷ Cell Mór (Maige) Enir is identified by Hogan, *Onom.*, s.v., with Kilmore to the E. of Armagh, H 942 512 (close to the royal crannóg of Loch Cal (Loughgall, H 909 515).

¹³⁸ *Canones Hibernenses*, i.29 (ed. and tr. Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, pp. 162–3).

Table 6.4. *Titles and places*

Titles regularly attached to a place	Titles often not so attached
(excelsus) <i>princeps</i> <i>scriba</i>	bishop anchorite

The *sapiens*, ‘scholar’, is found once in the text of the canons on bloodshed and refusal of hospitality, where he acts as a judge.¹³⁹ Otherwise the term is used only in the titles and introductions of some of the *Canones Hibernenses*: *Canones Hibernenses*, iii, are the work of a *synodus sapientium*, and so are *Canones Hibernenses*, vi. *Canones Hibernenses*, v, opens with an appeal to the *sapiens* to note the biblical examples which introduce the text.¹⁴⁰ *Sapientes* are, therefore, both the authors and the intended readership of these texts.

Neither in these shorter canonical texts nor in the *Hibernensis* do we find the same distinction between the *scriba* and the *sapiens* implied by the annals. Since these are general prescriptive texts, without any reference to places, the *scriba* could not appear in the eighth-century annals in his standard guise, namely that of a scholar of the highest rank attached to a particular named church. The *scriba* is a person of the highest rank in the hierarchy of learning and thus deserving of a status equivalent to that of a bishop or an eminent *princeps*. If there is any distinction between *scriba* and *sapiens* in the canons, *sapiens* is probably a more general term (including *scriba*) for someone with the authority to teach and to judge by virtue of his learning. It is possible to speak of a secular *sapiens* who, if he is truly wise, will not attempt to judge ecclesiastical cases.¹⁴¹ The *scriba* seems always to be ecclesiastical,¹⁴² his counterpart in vernacular texts is *súí litre*, ‘the learned man of the written word’, who knows the *recht litre*, the written law deriving from the Bible.¹⁴³ The latter is at the head of his own hierarchy of status, alongside the bishop and the rest of the seven grades of the Church.¹⁴⁴ A *sapiens* given an obit in the annals was probably also a person of the highest grade of learning; most of them would have been described in the laws as a *scriba*. Yet, as

¹³⁹ Ibid., iv.1 (ed. and tr. Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, pp. 170–1).

¹⁴⁰ Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, pp. 166, 170–4.

¹⁴¹ *Hib.* xxi.26.b. ¹⁴² *Hib.* xxi.28.

¹⁴³ For the terminology see *Uraicecht na Riar*, ed. Breatnach, pp. 84–5; cf. *Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchy, § 47, lines 602–3.

¹⁴⁴ *CIH* 2279.16. As the gloss suggests, *fer legind* seems to be the later term for the same office.

the example of Aldfrith shows, it was possible for someone to be counted a *sapiens* without discharging any special function in a church. None of the annalistic *sapientes* appears to be a man of distinctively secular learning, the *mundialis sapiens* of the *Hibernensis*.

(III) BISHOPS, SCRIBES, SCHOLARS AND THE *TÚATH*

'A *túath* without a scholar, a church, a poet and a king is not a *túath*.'¹⁴⁵ The Chronicle of Ireland gives most attention, in the period 750–850, to the eastern midlands, and in particular to the churches of Brega. It thus allows us to gain some impression of the distribution of episcopal churches, their possession of scribes and their relationship to kingdoms within the area ruled by *Síl nÁeda Sláne*. The legal statement can thus be tested on the ground (table 6.5).

The table shows a strong association in the ninth century between being a bishop and being a scribe. What is unclear is how far this pattern goes back before 800. It is always wise to take account of the possibility that the annalists are merely changing their habits of recording offices. For example, Flann Febla was recorded by the Annals of Ulster as abbot of Armagh.¹⁴⁶ In the list of signatories to *Cáin Adomnáin*, however, he is described as scholar and bishop of Armagh.¹⁴⁷ Since, however, the position of scribe carried with it judicial authority, the association shows that, in the ninth century, the bishops concerned were far from being the mere passive bearers of sacramental power that they have sometimes been thought to be.

No bishop is recorded for Domnach Pátraic – an important early Patrician church in the heartland of *Síl nÁeda Sláne* – nor for Domnach Sechnaill or Domnach Mór (near Navan). Here *domnach* churches were apparently not by this period episcopal churches. By the ninth century, at least, Clonard was at the opposite extreme of fortune from the old *domnach* churches.¹⁴⁸ It had some claims to be the principal church of Meath and may have had a continuous series of bishops. Clonard is likely to have considered its bishop a 'bishop of bishops' or 'metropolitan bishop'. The others are sometimes associated with particular sub-kingdoms: Duleek and Cíannacht Breg; Finglas and Gailenga Becca; Trevet and the Uí Chernaig branch of *Síl nÁeda Sláne*. It is not, however, possible to say that there is always one bishop to a *túath* nor that

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 1123.32. ¹⁴⁶ AU 715.1.

¹⁴⁷ M. Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Guarantor List of *Cáin Adomnáin*', *Peritia*, 1 (1982), pp. 180, 185–6.

¹⁴⁸ AU 851.5; 859.3; 870.1.

Table 6.5. *Churches in Brega associated with bishops and scribes, 690–900*¹

<i>Bishops</i>	<i>Scribes</i>	
1. Ard Breccáin: 781.3 Ardbraccan: N 82 67		
2. Áth Truim: Trim: N 80 57	821.4	821.4
3. Cell Fhoibrig: 838.1 Kilbrew: O 01 56	838.1	
4. Dom Liacc: 783.2; 872.1; 885.7 Duleek: O 04 68	872.1	
5. Finnglas: 812.1; 838.1; 867.2 Finglas: O 13 38	796.1; 812.1; 838.1; 867.2	
6. Lann Léire: 845.5 Dunleer: O 05 88		
7. Lusca: 791.1; 836.1; 883.1; 891.6 Lusk: O 21 54	697.11; 800.3	
8. Mainister Buíti: 837.1 Monasterboice: O 04 82		
9. Sláne: 838.7; 849.3; 856.8; 869.1 Slane: N 95 75	[sapiens 802.3; 806.3]	
10. Treoit: 774.2 Trevet: N 96 55	739.2; 774.2; 888.3	

Notes:

¹ The Old Irish name is given with the annal entry, the anglicised form with the grid reference. I have omitted AU 739.6, the obit of a bishop of Rechrann, since it is uncertain whether this is Rathlin Island or Lambay Island.

there are not sometimes more than one bishop to a *túath*. In the seventh century, Ultán moccu Chonchobair was bishop of Dál Conchobair; later this *gens* seems to have been subsumed within the Déisi Breg, ‘Vassal Peoples of Brega’.¹⁴⁹ There were clearly more bishops even in the ninth century than there would be after the reforms of the twelfth century. The problem was not too few bishops, but perhaps too many. Bishops in Brega were rarely of the families which dominated such churches as Lusk and Slane (table 6.6).

The evidence for ecclesiastical families dominating such churches as Lusk depends on the annals supplying the name of the father when they give the obit of an ecclesiastic. When churches pass from father to son,

¹⁴⁹ Tirechán, *Collectanea*, 18 (‘Ultano episcopo Conchuburnensi’); Muirchú, *Vita S. Patricii*, B Prologue, p. 62 (‘Uldanum episcopum Concubrensum’); *VT*² 636–7, 3058–9; *Martyrology of Tallaght*, 4 Sept.; *CGSH* § 722.4; *LL*, vi.1589, lines 48786–7; Doherty, ‘The Cult of St Patrick’, 75.

Table 6.6. *Kingdoms and churches in Brega*

Kingdoms in the area	Churches
Northern Brega (Knowth)	Slane
Southern Brega (Lagore)	Trevet, Kilbrew
Cíannacht Breg (mostly subsumed in N. Brega)	Duleek
Fir Airde Cíannachtae ¹ (the part which was not subsumed, but perhaps a sub-kingdom earlier)	Monasterboice, ² Dunleer ³
Cenél Lóegairi	Trim
Fir Cúl mBreg (Síl nDlúthaig)	Tuilén? ⁴
Gailenga Collumrach	Lusk ⁵
Gailenga Becca	Finglas
Uí Maccu Úais Breg	?
Dési Breg/Temro	?
Mugdorna Breg	?

Notes:

¹ Earlier, Adomnán's Ard Cíannachtae was the area between the Delvin and the Liffey, roughly the later Fingal and thus North Co. Dublin, *VSC* ii.4. The most important church in this area was Lusk, but the Columban Rechru (Lambay Island) was offshore.

² See the genealogy, *CGH* i.247 (154 a 18), and compare AU 1056.8; 1059.7.

³ But note the association of this church with the Uí Ségáin of the Fir Rois: Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, p. 118, and the description of the lands of the Fir Rois as stretching 'ó Lerca co Léire', *VT*² 2160.

⁴ In the ninth century this kingdom was overshadowed by the new foundation of Kells, just to the south of Tuilén / Dulane; Kells was closely associated with Cland Cholmáin.

⁵ *CGH* i.168–9 (Cíannacht Midi as in the variant reading from Ballymote is unlikely; the pedigree implies that the kindred was of the Gailenga, from Cormac m. Taidg; see *CGH* i.246, 154 a 4). For the likely situation of the Gailenga Collumrach (within the area called Ard Cíannachtae by Adomnán), see Hogan, *Onom.*, s.v. Collamair. I take these Gailenga to have been early allies of the Cíannacht Breg.

paternity is evidently crucial. Yet, very often, the obits of clerics do not give a patronym. This raises the possibility that the annalist's choice, whether or not to give a patronym, is significant, and that it may be worthwhile investigating the incidence of patronymics among the different categories of churchmen. Table 6.7 gives the figures for the first half of the eighth century. In this period the annals only occasionally give more than one title to a given individual, whereas in the ninth century this is very common. There is a clear difference between the abbot and the bishop, and between the abbot and the scribe. Although the total numbers for the anchorite are not large, that office appears to

Table 6.7. *The incidence of patronymics in ecclesiastical obits in AU 701–50*

	+ <i>patronymic</i>	– <i>patronymic</i>	<i>ratio +:–</i>
abbot	24	32	3:4
abbot + scribe	0	1	
<i>heres</i>	1	0	
<i>princeps</i>	2	2	1:8
abbot + bishop	2	0	
bishop	2	16	
scribe	2	8	1:4
<i>sapiens</i>	4 ¹	7	
<i>philosophus</i>	1	0	
<i>doctor</i>	1	0	
anchorite	1	4	
<i>sapiens</i> + anchorite	0	1	

Notes:

¹ Includes Aldfrith, king of Northumbria, at AU 704.3.

belong to the side of the bishop and the scribe rather than that of the abbot. In other words, there does seem to be an association between paternity (and thus membership of a particular lineage) and the office of abbot; but there is not the same association between paternity and the offices of bishop, scribe or anchorite.

A century later, in the first half of the ninth century, the situation has changed, so far as the Annals of Ulster are concerned, because of the number of obits recording more than one office held by a given person. The types of combination are shown in table 6.8.

If we then look at the incidence of patronymics in the major groups in table 6.8, the result is as table 6.9.

These figures indicate that there is still a contrast between the bishop and the abbot, but the scribe is now closer to the abbot than to the bishop, whereas a hundred years previously, he was closer to the bishop. The evidence thus suggests that the office of scribe was becoming more hereditary.

The interest in holding more than one office is not surprising given the Irish disposition to recognise different sources of ecclesiastical authority and the importance of synods in the government of the Church. Not every abbot was of equal standing, as the references to *excelsi principes* in the canons show; possession of an extra claim to high standing probably, therefore, played a part in deciding the balance of

Table 6.8. *Plurality of ecclesiastical titles in AU 801–50*

abbot + lector	1	805.3
abbot + scholar	1	806.3
abbot + scholar + judge	1	802.3
abbot + scribe	1	808.1
abbot + scribe + anchorite	2	839.1
abbot + scribe + sacerdos	1	813.2
<i>Total of abbot + other than bishop</i>	7	
abbot + bishop	3	814.3; 817.13; 826.5
abbot + bishop + scribe	3	808.2; 822.1; 830.2
abbot + bishop + anchorite	3	812.4; 822.9; 837.1
abbot + bishop + anchorite + scribe	3	812.1; 821.4; 840.7
<i>Total of abbot + bishop (+ other)</i>	12	
bishop + anchorite	7	823.3; 836.1; 838.7; 843.5; 843.5; 845.5; 849.3
bishop + anchorite + <i>princeps</i>	1	812.2
bishop + princeps	1	826.11
bishop + scholar	1	825.1
bishop + scribe	3	834.7; 838.1; 838.1
bishop + scribe + anchorite	2	817.1; 821.4
<i>Total of bishop + other than abbot</i>	15	
scribe + anchorite	3	807.5; 843.7; 847.1
doctor + anchorite		1825.2
scribe + <i>princeps</i>	2	810.1; 817.2
scribe + scholar	1	846.1
scribe + scholar + <i>sacerdos</i>	1	831.4
scribe + doctor	1	814.2
<i>Scribe (or doctor) + (not bishop or abbot)</i>	9	

authority in synods. The incidence of patronymics offers more general evidence to back up the particular examples of hereditary abbacies. It looks as though the office of abbot carried with it control over the material assets of a church.¹⁵⁰ As a result, descent was much more important in determining who became abbot than it was for the office of bishop. On the other hand, because ultimate authority lay with the synod, the abbot was far from enjoying a monopoly of power within the Church. Bishops, as well as scribes, remained members of synods. They were also rather more likely than were abbots to combine their office with that of a scribe. What is distinctive about the Irish Church in the eighth and early ninth centuries is not any collapse in the authority of

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Sharpe, 'Some Problems Concerning the Organization of the Church', 263–5.

Table 6.9. *The incidence of patronymics 801–50*

	+ <i>patronymic</i>	– <i>patronymic</i>	+ <i>nepos</i>
abbot + X (not bishop)	4	3 (all + scribe)	0
abbot + bishop (+ X)	4	6	2
bishop + X (not abbot)	3	10	1
scribe + X (not bishop or abbot)	5	3	1

the bishop but the combination of two things: the ultimate authority of synods and an acknowledgement that those at the head of a major monastery or at the summit of a hierarchy of ecclesiastical learning were entitled to sit in synod together with the bishops. It may well be, however, that with the rising intensity of Viking activity in the 830s, synods, like the parallel *óenach* of Tailtiu, declined sharply in importance.

When the Easter controversy first became a serious issue in Ireland at the end of the 620s, the method used to resolve it was to submit the question to a synod.¹⁵¹ The letter of the pope-elect John in 640 appears to have been a reply to a further enquiry, this time on behalf of the major ecclesiastics of the northern half of Ireland, probably assembled in synod.¹⁵² The crucial role taken by synods in the resolution of ecclesiastical disputes is put into sharp relief by the consequence of the Easter dispute: because it was not settled during the seventh century, separate synods were held for those who accepted the Roman Easter and those who did not.¹⁵³ The synod was likewise central to the imposition of the Church's authority upon lay society: it was the synod which, according to the laws, required each head of a kindred to give a pledge to guarantee the good behaviour of his kinsmen.¹⁵⁴ The authority of synods was common form for the whole Church in the late Roman and early medieval periods; what is less usual about the Irish synod is its membership. Synods were normally, in the rest of the Church, assemblies of bishops; but in Ireland, membership was wider. Synods thus afford part of an

¹⁵¹ Cummián, *De Controversia Paschali*, ed. Walsh and Ó Cróinín, lines 259–80; the evidence for Mag Léne being in the area of Durrow is clear: AT, CS = 1020 (Máelmúadh Hua Máelmuaid, king of Fír Chell, taken from the church of Durrow and killed in Mag Léne); Moylen was in Farcall in King's Co. according to ACLon, p. 59.

¹⁵² Bede, *HE* ii.19; D. Ó Cróinín, "New Heresy for Old": Pelagianism in Ireland and the Papal Letter of 640', *Speculum*, 60 (1985), 505–16.

¹⁵³ For example, the so-called 'Second Synod of St Patrick' was a *Synodus Romana*: e.g. *Hib.* ii.23; ii.14, 15. b, 16; Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, pp. 125–33; the importance of synods was pointed out by Corish, *The Christian Mission*, p. 36.

¹⁵⁴ *Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchy, lines 277–82.

answer to the question whether, and how far, the Irish Church was less episcopal than was normal in the Church at large.

The letter of the pope-elect was addressed to five bishops, five priests, 'to Sárán and to the other Irish teachers or abbots'. The five priests appear all to have been abbots of major monasteries, that is *excelsi principes*. There were also 'teachers', *doctores*. Plummer was probably correct in identifying Sárán with the Sárán, grandson of Crítán, who died in 662: the annals describe him as a *sapiens*.¹⁵⁵ If the persons named in the letter had all taken part in a synod, it had at least three categories of participant: bishops, 'distinguished heads of churches', and scholars. Prominent abbots were also consulted by Cummian, and apparently took part in the Synod of Mag Léne.¹⁵⁶ Adomnán has a story about a synod held at the Uí Néill royal site of Tailtiu, to which Columba, previously excommunicated by this same synod, came to put his case. One man is mentioned as being a participant, Brendan of Birr, in other words the abbot of a major monastery on the border of Meath and Munster.¹⁵⁷

It appears, then, that all those who enjoyed a high status, equivalent to that of a king of a *túath*, were entitled to attend a synod and to take a full part in the proceedings. The Annals of Ulster record a meeting of the synods of the Uí Néill and the Leinstermen at Tara in 780, 'at which were present many anchorites and scribes, led by Dublither'. The participation of *scribae* on this occasion is paralleled by the titles given to *Canones Hibernenses*, iii and vi, 'A Synod of Scholars', *Synodus Sapientium*. Learning, not just possession of the office of bishop or of abbot, might entitle a man to membership of a synod.

The composition of the Irish synod shows that the contrast between an episcopal and a monastic church is too simple. True, unlike its Frankish counterpart of the sixth and seventh centuries, the Irish synod was not confined to bishops. Yet neither was it confined to the heads of great monastic churches. Instead, the synod shows us an Irish Church which allowed for several sources of authority: the orders of a bishop; the prestige which flowed from being the abbot of a major monastery; the learning of the scribe and the scholar; the asceticism of the anchorite. Because it allowed for distinct sources of authority deployed by men of equal rank, it was obliged to give to the synod an even more central position than in Francia or in England. Only by focusing these different authorities in the one institution could cohesion be maintained.

¹⁵⁵ AU 662.1; C. Plummer (ed.), *Baedae Opera Historica*, note on Bede, *HE* ii.19.

¹⁵⁶ Cummian, *De Controversia Paschali*, ed. Walsh and Ó Cróinín, pp. 90–2.

¹⁵⁷ Adomnán, *VSC*, iii.3.

The geographical scope of a synod was, in the first place, provincial, but it was possible for joint meetings to be held of the synods of more than one province; indeed, it was precisely these which were sufficiently remarkable to be noticed by the annals. In 804 'a meeting of the synods of the Uí Néill' was held at Dún Cúair near the borders of Meath and Leinster.¹⁵⁸ The meeting was presided over by Condmach son of Dub dá Leithe, abbot of Armagh; he was also a member of the royal lineage of the Airthir and a close associate of Áed Oirdnide, then king of Cenél nÉogain and Tara.¹⁵⁹ The context of the meeting was prolonged campaigning by Áed against Leinster; this explains the choice of a royal *dún* close to the frontier of Leinster as a place of assembly.¹⁶⁰ A generation earlier, during the reign of the Clann Cholmáin ruler, Donnchad mac Domnaill, as king of Tara, 'a meeting of the synods of the Uí Néill and the Leinstermen was held at Tara in 780'.¹⁶¹ Earlier in the same year Donnchad had invaded Leinster, driven its principal kings before him in flight, and plundered both kingdoms and churches.¹⁶² He was now able to bring Leinster churchmen to the symbolic royal site of Tara and so demonstrate to the full his authority as *rex Temro*.¹⁶³

These were unusual occasions. More normal was the synod mentioned by Adomnán as being held at Tailtiu to try Columba. This would have been a synod of the Uí Néill as a whole, since Columba was of the northern Uí Néill, while Tailtiu lay in the lands of the southern Uí Néill, and yet there is no suggestion that he denied its jurisdiction. Since, however, Tailtiu was also the site of the annual *óenach* or assembly organised by the Uí Néill, an obvious possibility is that the synod met at the time of the *óenach*.¹⁶⁴ Tailtiu lay within a mile or two of Ráith Airthir, the principal royal seat of Síl nÁeda Sláne in the seventh century, and still, in the early ninth, the main residence of one of its branches, Síl nDlúthaig of the kingdom of Fir Chúl.¹⁶⁵ It was at Ráith Airthir in 789 that Donnchad, king of Tara, 'dishonoured the staff of Jesus and the relic of St Patrick on the occasion of an *óenach*'.¹⁶⁶ These were the most sacred symbols of the authority of the heir of Patrick, the abbot of

¹⁵⁸ AU 804.7. Dún Cúair is probably Rathcore, N 76 45 (cf. Ráith Ailinne / Dún Ailinne).

¹⁵⁹ His grandfather, Sínach, was the eponymous ancestor of the Clann Sinaig, the branch of the royal lineage of the Airthir (the kingdom in which Armagh lay) which established an hereditary claim to the abbacy of Armagh: *CGH* i.181. ¹⁶⁰ Cf. AU 805.7, as well as 804.5, 10.

¹⁶¹ AU 780.12. ¹⁶² AU 780.7. ¹⁶³ Cf. AU 797.1.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. *Triads of Ireland*, ed. Meyer, no. 35: 'Tri háenaig Hérenn: áenach Tailten, áenach Crúachan, áenach Colmáin Ela'; Binchy, 'The Fair of Tailtiu and the Feast of Tara'.

¹⁶⁵ Tailtiu is Teltown, N 80 74; Ráith Airthir is Oristown, N 79 75. Cf. AU 810.1, the obit of Cathal mac Fiachrach 'rex Ratho Airthir 7 Uirorum Cul'. ¹⁶⁶ AU 789.17 (cf. 831. 5).

Armagh, at the time Dub dá Leithe son of Sínach.¹⁶⁷ Donnchad was not the best friend of Armagh, since it was usually allied with the rival Cenél nÉogain.¹⁶⁸ Nevertheless the abbot of Armagh had a strong claim to preside over the synod or synods of the Uí Néill; and he may have been asserting his rights on this occasion.

In the ninth century, Máel Sechnaill mac Máele Rúanaid would use the *rigdál*, 'royal meeting', as a grand occasion on which to demonstrate his authority.¹⁶⁹ In 851 he held such a *rigdál* at Armagh, attended by two sets of secular nobles, those of the Uí Néill and of the province of Ulster, and two sets of clerics, the *samad*, 'association', of Patrick, and the clergy of Meath.¹⁷⁰ This suggests that when the Annals of Ulster referred in 804 to the synods, rather than the synod, of the Uí Néill, some such division as in 851 may have been intended, so that the northern Uí Néill and the southern Uí Néill had separate synods.¹⁷¹ This division may well have arisen in the eighth century as the alternation between Clann Cholmáin and Cenél nÉogain got under way, whereas earlier, as the summoning of Columba to Taitiu suggests, there may have been a single synod for all the Uí Néill lands. In addition, however, the use of a meeting between two major kings and their nobles as an occasion for an ecclesiastical assembly confirms the notion that secular and ecclesiastical assemblies often coincided in place and time; and this strengthens the suggestion that the regular assembly, the *óenach* of Taitiu, could also coincide with the meeting of a synod. The question whether such secular and ecclesiastical assemblies were combined affairs or merely concurrent can be left until their functions have been studied a little further.

The *rigdál* at Armagh in 851 showed the greater power of Máel Sechnaill in that the king of the Ulstermen, Matudán mac Muiredaig, came to Armagh, well within the territories controlled by the Uí Néill. In 827, however, Conchobar mac Donnchada met the king of Munster,

¹⁶⁷ His obit is AU 793.1; there was another abbot whose obit is AU 791.1, but Dub-dá-leithe was active as abbot several years earlier (see AU 783.9).

¹⁶⁸ Cf. AU 778.4, illustrating the alliance between Clann Cholmáin and Iona discussed by Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, pp. 64–7.

¹⁶⁹ A much earlier such occasion was the *magna conuentio* of Druim Cete, AU 575, referred to by Adomnán, *VSC* i.49 as a *regum conductum*, attended by two kings, Áed mac Ainmuirech and Áedán mac Gabráin, and at least two *excelsi principes*, Columba of Iona and Comgall of Bangor. Cf. J. Bannerman, *Studies in the History of Dalriada* (Edinburgh, 1974), pp. 157–70, M. Herbert, 'The Preface to *Amra Colum Cille*', 69–72.

¹⁷⁰ AU 851.5 (cf. 851.2).

¹⁷¹ The Airgialla, in whose territory Armagh lay, would then have belonged for these purposes to the synod of the northern Uí Néill, while the Ciannacht Breg, the Gailenga Móra, the Delbnae Assail and Delbnae Bethra etc. belonged to the southern Uí Néill.

Fedlimid mac Crimthainn, at a *rígdál* at Birr, on the frontier between the lands of the Uí Néill and Munster.¹⁷² Nearly a century earlier, in 737, a Cenél nÉogain king of Tara, Áed Allán, met the king of Munster, Cathal mac Finnguini, at Terryglas, again a major monastery, but this time a little inside Munster territory, about thirteen miles west of Birr.¹⁷³ As in contemporary continental practice, meetings on the boundary suggest equality, those within one territory the superiority of the ruler of that territory.¹⁷⁴ These meetings between the leading kings of the northern and southern halves of Ireland echo the great occasion of the meeting at Birr in 697 at which, according to the Annals of Ulster, Adomnán 'gave the Law of the Innocents to the peoples'. From the list of the guarantors of this law, it is apparent that the meeting at Birr was a major assembly of the principal churchmen and kings of all Ireland – and also the king of the Picts.¹⁷⁵ Some probably sent deputies, but nevertheless it was an extraordinary achievement made possible only by the combined authority of Adomnán, abbot of Iona, and his kinsman Loingsech mac Óengusa, king of Tara. The importance of their collaboration is underlined by a reference in *Críth Gablach*, a legal tract written not long after the event. The 'Law of the Innocents' is there described as 'the Law of Adomnán' and as an example of one of three types of edict which it was 'right for a king to pledge upon his peoples' (the plural 'peoples' shows that we have to do with an overking).¹⁷⁶ An earlier passage in the tract shows that such pledging of an edict upon a king's peoples normally took place at an *óenach*.¹⁷⁷ In 697, however, it was not at an *óenach* but at a *rígdál* held near the boundary and within a major monastery.

The ecclesiastical edict, usually known as a *cáin*, was the application to the needs of the Church of a traditional instrument of royal authority. Only by harnessing the power of a king, exercised through proclamation of an edict at an *óenach* (or, occasionally, a *rígdál*), could the Church secure changes of the kind desired by Adomnán – in his case the enforcement of the non-combatant privileges of clergy, women and children. The authority of the edict depended on securing guarantors, not just kings or heirs-apparent but representatives of each kindred.¹⁷⁸ They would hardly have been forthcoming had not the king been willing to lend his full support. Hence, for example, in 783, the Law of Patrick was

¹⁷² AU 827.10. ¹⁷³ AU 737.9; Terryglas (M 86 00) was in the kingdom of Múscraige Tíre.

¹⁷⁴ For example, *Annales Regni Francorum*, ed. F. Kurze, MGH SRG (Hanover, 1895), s.a. 811 as opposed to s.a. 822, 826.

¹⁷⁵ Ní Dhonnchada, 'The Guarantor List of *Cáin Adomnáin*', 178–215.

¹⁷⁶ *Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchy, lines 521–4.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, lines 504–8.

¹⁷⁸ *Cáin Adomnáin*, ed. Meyer, § 53.

promulgated at Crúachu – the traditional royal centre of Connaught – by Dub dá Leithe, abbot of Armagh, and Tipraite son of Tadc, king of the Connachta.¹⁷⁹

The promulgation of a *cáin* was not, however, the normal business of a synod. For one thing, the *cáin* was unusual in employing secular authority to the full, in being promulgated by both a leading churchman and a king, and by being in Irish.¹⁸⁰ The text of *Cáin Adomnáin* is as much or more an expression of royal power and the expertise of the king's judge, as it is of the learning encapsulated in the *Hibernensis*. The latter, however, and the *Canones Hibernenses* show that the texts emanating from Irish synods were normally in Latin and did not openly depend on royal authority.¹⁸¹ More fundamentally, legislation of any kind was not the sole function of a synod. It was also a court. This is clear from Adomnán's story of Columba being tried before a synod at Tailtiu; likewise the *Hibernensis* assumes that local ecclesiastical judges will initially settle cases, but difficult issues may go to a synod.¹⁸² This enables us to give an answer to the question raised above, whether a synod was combined with a secular assembly at an *óenach* or was concurrent with it, the two assemblies meeting on the same occasion but separately. The likely answer is that when a *cáin* was to be promulgated, the two were combined, but that normally they were concurrent.

Even if the secular and the ecclesiastical assemblies normally met separately, the sites chosen for synods, the occasions when some of them met (as at Dún Cúair in 804 in the midst of campaigning against the Leinstermen), and, above all, the geographical scope of their membership all go to show that when it came to synods, Church and kingdom marched hand in hand. The Irish situation recalls the combination of assembly and synod in Francia, notably in 614 when Chlothar II gave solemn expression to his newly won position as the sole king of the Franks by the secular edict and the church canons passed at Paris, the capital of his kingdom.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁹ AU 783.9. ¹⁸⁰ See below, pp. 559–69.

¹⁸¹ A further contrast may be that normal good behaviour was secured by pledges given by the representative of the kindred to the synod, whereas the *cáin* required a more elaborate array of agencies of enforcement, the *aithre chána* and the *giall*: contrast *Crith Gablach*, lines 277–82, with *Cáin Adomnáin*, §§ 39, 48–9, 53; *Cáin Domnaig*, ed. V. Hull, *Ériu*, 20 (1996), §§ 3–4, 6–7.

¹⁸² *Hib.* xx.5.a; cf. xx.2,3. a.

¹⁸³ Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, pp. 104–5.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Columba, Iona and Lindisfarne

In 563 Columba, a man of royal birth aged forty-one, left Ireland and went to found a monastery in the Hebrides.¹ Iona is a small but comparatively fertile island off the western tip of the Ross of Mull.² Iona, Mull, the nearby islands of Tiree and Coll, as well as Colonsay, Jura and Islay further south, together with the mainland of Argyll, all belonged to the Irish kingdom of Dál Riata; and Columba is said by the annals to have received Iona as a grant from the king, Conall mac Comgaill.³ Columba also founded monasteries in Ireland, of which the most famous, Durrow and Derry, were both probably established after 563: Durrow appears to have been founded *c.* 590, while Fiachrae mac Ciaráin, ‘one of the two founders of Derry’ according to some annals, died in 620.⁴ Columba was a member of Cenél Conaill, a branch of the Uí Néill and the ruling kindred of a kingdom that included most of the modern Co. Donegal. His immediate successor and principal lieutenant, Baithéne, was also of Cenél Conaill, as were most, but by no means all, the abbots up to at least the second half of the eighth century.⁵ The link with Cenél Conaill

¹ *CS*, AClon = AU 563 (AT makes it Columba’s forty-fifth year). It was originally omitted in AU but added by another hand; notwithstanding its absence from the first hand of AU it probably derived from the Iona annals (AU omits some entries connected with Iona: see n. 4 below for another example).

² The medieval abbey, at NM 286 245, lies within the vallum, the boundary ditch and bank, of the Early Christian monastery: The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, *Argyll: An Inventory of the Monuments*, iv, *Iona* (Edinburgh, 1982), no. 3.

³ AU 574 (also AT); cf. Adomnán, *VSC* i.7; for Bede’s account, by which Columba received Iona as a grant from the king of the Picts, see Bannerman, *Studies in the History of Dalriada*, p. 79, and the discussion below.

⁴ On Durrow, Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, p. 32, who points out that Adomnán, *VSC* i.3, implies that it was founded during the abbacy of Ailither, 585–99. On Derry: the entries in AT and *CS* corresponding to AU 620.2 (the phrase ‘i.e. of the second founder of Derry’, which is in Latin, is likely to have been part of the Iona annals, and so of the Chronicle of Ireland, but to have been omitted in AU). Fiachrae belonged to Cenél Conaill, but two generations later than Columba; Sharpe, *Adomnán*, pp. 255–6 (n. 54).

⁵ *CGSH* 336–47 is a collection, probably dating from the middle of the eighth century but with later additions (Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, pp. 36–7), of genealogies of those abbots belonging to Cenél Conaill.

mattered, not least because Cenél Conaill was at one of the two peaks of its power from c. 560 to 642.⁶

(I) THE SOURCES

The principal source for Columba is a Life written by one of his successors as abbot, who was also a kinsman, Adomnán. It was not the first written account of the saint; an earlier text, the work of the seventh abbot, Cumméne the Fair (*ob.* 669), his *Book on the Miracles of Power of Columba*, has not survived apart from one fragment.⁷ Adomnán's Life, written c. 700, is a text of great interest, particularly for the culture of the author and the outlook of the primary intended readership, the community of Iona.⁸ Adomnán wished to present a portrait of Columba in the tradition of Athanasius' Anthony, of Sulpicius Severus' Martin and especially of Gregory the Great's Benedict. Adomnán's Columba was, therefore, the *patronus* of a community of monks, the personal model of their way of life and the man by virtue of whose friendship with God, exhibited in his miracles and in the manner of his death, his monks might hope to follow him to heaven. His monks, therefore, were the primary concern of Adomnán's Columba, thus offering direct evidence on what Adomnán thought an abbot should be; but, again as with Adomnán, Columba's friendships extended beyond the monastery, to other communities, to pupils who never became monks, and even to kings. The last category is notable, for in some early Irish saints' lives, kings seem utterly foreign to the monastic ideal, savages ululating over the severed heads of their victims.⁹ Yet Columba was the friend not only of Irish kings but of the Briton Rhydderch Hael, king of Strathclyde, just as Adomnán was the friend of the Englishman Aldfrith, king of Northumbria.¹⁰

As for other great *patroni* of monks, Comgall of Bangor, Cainnech of Aghaboe, Colmán of Lynally, Brendan of Clonfert and Brendan of Birr, they were not presented by Adomnán as the competitors of Columba, but rather as his allies, as men who, through their own powers

⁶ Whereas the ruling line of Cenél Conaill was confined to the descendants of Ainmire mac Sétnai, Iona chose its abbots from several branches.

⁷ This was added in MS A of Adomnán's Life, iii.5, in a smaller size script.

⁸ The First Preface says that he is writing 'in response to the entreaties of the brethren'; in i.1, Iona is 'this our principal island', 'haec nostra insula primaria'; the title of ii.28 mentions 'this island'; ii.44 and 45 evidently assume that the monks of Iona are to be the readers of the work.

⁹ This is even true of a saint such as Áed mac Bricc, who was himself of the Uí Néill: *Vita S. Aidi Kíllariensis*, c. 38, ed. Heist, *Vitae*, p. 178 ('Reges enim erant semper immites ei, sed divina virtute ei obedire cogeabantur'); *Vita I.S. Fintani seu Munnu*, c. 20, ed. Heist, *Vitae*, p. 203; *Vita Prima S. Brigidae*, tr. Connolly, cc. 62–6. ¹⁰ Adomnán, *VSC* i.11, 13, 15, ii.46.

of spiritual perception, recognised Columba as a friend of God.¹¹ Just as Columba was a friend of angels who could escort a soul on the perilous journey from the body to heaven and defend it from the attacks and malevolent accusations of demons, so he was a friend of other saints who enjoyed the same heavenly privileges.¹² This alliance of saints and angels on earth prefigured the society of heaven itself.

Columba's concerns extended beyond his own community to laymen and women – to the hunger of a poor family, to the sorrow of a husband whose wife refused sex and to the wife who found her husband physically repellent, to the woman enslaved and taken away to live in a foreign land, to the souls of virtuous laymen and women at death. His protection was even extended to a former pupil whose conduct was unworthy of his master:

And know this too: you will live lecherously all your days in Ireland, in your own district, and you will be reviled to your face. But I have won from the Lord by my prayers that because you are our foster-son, you shall do penance before your death and receive mercy from God.¹³

Both this story and others demonstrated a confidence in the potential effectiveness of penitential discipline.¹⁴ Although he had left Ireland to live in pilgrimage in Britain, he had not broken off his links with homeland and kindred: he revisited Ireland on occasion,¹⁵ endeavoured to cement an alliance between the Uí Néill and the Dál Ríata, among whom he lived, and came to the aid of a kinswoman in painful childbirth.¹⁶ His pilgrimage or *peregrinatio* remained less far-reaching than that of Columbanus (to be considered in the next chapter), for although he left Ireland for Britain he remained within the Irish people.

Adomnán's conception of Columba was not the only one possible. He may well have had particular reasons for writing the Life arising from two contradictory influences: on the one hand, Cenél Conaill was at a peak of its power c. 700, and on the other, the community of Iona was split over the question of Easter. Moreover, the Life belongs within the first efflorescence of hagiography in the British Isles. Within a generation before 700 Ireland had seen the work of Muirchú and Tírechán on St Patrick and Cogitosus on St Brigit; and within a generation after 700, two prose Lives of St Cuthbert were written in Northumbria, as well as Lives of Wilfrid of Ripon and Ceolfrith of Wearmouth-Jarrow. The

¹¹ Ibid., iii.3, 4, 17.

¹² Ibid., iii.6–14; the theme is central to the visions of Fursu, Bede, *HE* iii. 19.

¹³ Ibid., iii.21 (translated by R. Sharpe). ¹⁴ Ibid., i.50, ii.39. ¹⁵ Ibid., i.42.

¹⁶ Ibid., ii.40.

particular significance of these texts can be elucidated by comparing them with each other, by placing them as closely as possible within a historical context, and by seeing how these Lives relate to the classics of the genre, especially Evagrius' translation of Athanasius' Life of Anthony, Sulpicius Severus' Life of Martin and the Life of Benedict that forms Book II of Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*.

Apart from Adomnán's Life, the most important source for Columba is the *Amra Choluim Chille*, 'The Wonders of Columba', a poem composed in Irish, but with a deliberately extensive use of learned borrowings from Latin.¹⁷ This is ascribed to a poet called Dallán Forgaill, 'The Little Blind Man of Superior Testimony', apparently a nickname. The ascription is not of much help since we have no reliable evidence about his date or background. The poem itself, however, can hardly be later than the early seventh century; the ninth-century dating given it by Stokes and Strachan a hundred years ago cannot stand.¹⁸ On the other hand, the text is difficult; indeed, it was already openly admitted to be difficult by the eleventh-century glossators. In the absence of a proper modern edition it is impossible to be sure, but the extant copies may all descend from a single exemplar which was extensively annotated at the beginning of the eleventh century.¹⁹ Parts of the text have never been given an acceptable translation, and it remains uncertain how far the difficulties are due to faulty transmission or to a deliberate choice by the poet of an obscure and archaic style. Yet, in spite of all these obstacles enough of the poem can already be understood to make it indefensible to ignore so early a source for Columba. It is the only text which offers direct evidence on the impression made by the saint on his contemporaries.

Evidence from a generation later comes from two poems probably by a single author, Béccán mac Luigdech.²⁰ They are both considerably

¹⁷ The standard edition remains that of Stokes, 'The Bodleian *Amra Choluim Chille*'; the most accessible text and translation is by Clancy and Márkus, *Iona: The Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery*, pp. 104–15.

¹⁸ This is apparent from D. A. Binchy, 'Old Irish *axa*', *Ériu*, 18 (1958), 164; V. Hull, 'Amra Choluim Chille', *ŽCP*, 28 (1960–1), 242–51; for further references see Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, p. 10 n. 5.

¹⁹ M. Herbert, 'The Preface to the *Amra Choluim Chille*', in Ó Corráin *et al.* (eds.), *Sagas, Saints and Storytellers*, 67–75.

²⁰ Both are edited and translated by F. Kelly, 'A Poem in Praise of Columba Cille', *Ériu*, 24 (1973), 1–34; *Tuightraid Bhécáin*, *Ériu*, 26 (1975), 66–98; they are also included in Clancy and Márkus, *Iona: The Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery*, pp. 136–51. It is possible that this Béccán is to be identified with the anchorite named Béccán who, in 632 or 633, was addressed, together with Ségène, abbot of Iona, in Cummin's letter on the Easter question, and even with the Béccán of Rhum whose obit is given in AU s.a. 677 (see Clancy and Márkus, *Iona: The Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery*, pp. 130–4).

shorter than the *Amra* and contain less detail, but they are nonetheless helpful in that they make it possible to trace in broad outline the development of the saint's cult: with the *Amra* c. 600, Béccán's poems c. 640, the fragment of Cumméne's Life c. 660, and finally Adomnán's Life c. 700, we have testimony from every generation in the seventh century.

The portrait of Columba presented by the *Amra* differs sharply from that offered by Adomnán. The latter, as we have seen already,²¹ divided his Life into three books: the first was on miracles of knowledge – the perception of the future or of things far away in space; the second was on miracles of power; the third Columba's converse with angels, culminating in his death, when angels came to lead his soul to heaven. Only the third theme has a proper counterpart in the *Amra*. The poem may also, however, be interpreted as having three main themes, although they do not have the structural importance in the work that their counterparts possess in Adomnán's Life. One of these is, indeed, the saint's affinity with the angelic world: in the *Amra*, too, the holy man's death is a conveyance of his soul by angels from this world to heaven. Yet even within this theme, the *Amra* couples together angels and apostles. As for the other main themes of the poem, they are his scholarship and his asceticism. Neither of these qualities is, of course, denied by Adomnán, but he does not insist on them, whereas the poem does.

The poem even sets out to tell us more about Columba's reading than does Adomnán, Latin scholar though the latter was. According to the *Amra*, Columba 'used the judgements of Basil'.²² This is most likely to be a reference to a Latin translation of a monastic rule by Basil.²³ Although Basil was also renowned for his penitential teaching, an aspect of the spiritual life that concerned Columba, it does not appear that there were versions of his penitential teaching available in Latin; the first person to introduce Basil into the western penitential tradition was Theodore of Canterbury, a century later than Columba.²⁴ True, the *Amra* claims that Columba learnt Greek grammar, but an elementary knowledge of the language does not imply that he had any extensive access to the Greek Fathers.²⁵ The Rule of Basil was, however, translated into Latin by Rufinus and was known to Columba's younger contemporary, Columbanus.²⁶ Since Columbanus was trained as a monk at Bangor, his

²¹ See above, p. 191. ²² Stokes, 'The Bodleian Amra', § 48.

²³ *Basilii Regula a Rufino latine versa*, ed. K. Zelzer, CSEL 86 (Vienna, 1986).

²⁴ T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'The Penitential of Theodore and the *Iudicia Theodorii*', in M. Lapidge (ed.), *Archbishop Theodore: Commemorative Studies on His Life and Influence* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 152, 158–62. ²⁵ Stokes, 'The Bodleian Amra', § 123.

²⁶ Stancliffe, 'The Thirteen Sermons Attributed to Columbanus', p. 106.

evidence, taken with that of the *Amra*, make it very probable that the Rule was intended by 'the judgements of Basil'. That does not imply that Iona lived according to Basil's Rule: in the sixth and seventh centuries we are in a period when monastic founders established a way of life using a variety of rules. But it does imply that the Rule of Basil had a major influence on the monastic life as practised on Iona in the time of Columba. The influence of Basil may, perhaps, be seen in one of the most widespread characteristics of Irish and British monasticism, namely its preference for a 'second abbot' (a prior, but often with the right of succession) as against the system by which a single abbot had below him *decani*, men in charge of ten monks. The latter was strongly recommended by St Benedict, following Cassian and the tradition of the great Egyptian founder of cenobitic monasteries, Pachomius; Irish *sechnap*, Welsh *segynnab*, however, point to the first system, found in Basil as well as in Caesarius of Arles.²⁷

The *Amra* also refers to John Cassian and immediately goes on to say that Columba conquered *gula*, gluttony.²⁸ In Cassian's *Institutes* and in his *Conferences* there are discussions of the eight principal vices, among which *gula* (or *gastrimargia*) finds a place.²⁹ Cassian's teaching was undoubtedly known to Cumman, author of an influential penitential which can be dated to the seventh century.³⁰ Basil of Caesarea and John Cassian were two classical monastic writers, recommended, for example, in the last chapter of the Rule of St Benedict; it is not surprising, though it is very helpful, to have evidence that they were read on Iona in the time of Columba. It implies that Columba's Iona was part of the mainstream of western monasticism.

The contrast between the ascetic scholar of the *Amra* and the visionary and miracle-worker of Adomnán's Life can be overdrawn, but it is real enough to demand an explanation. Reasons can be given, both from the way Adomnán's stories came to him and from his literary purposes. First, there were elements in the *Amra*'s portrait which were not helpful

²⁷ See K. Hallinger, 'Papst Gregor der Grosse und der hl. Benedikt', in B. Steidle (ed.), *Commentationes in Regulam Sancti Benedicti* = *Studia Anselmiana*, 42 (Rome, 1957), pp. 395–7.

²⁸ Stokes, 'The Bodleian *Amra*', § 55 (the form of the name, *Cassión*, shows that it was derived from British Latin and thus indicates that Irish knowledge of his writings derived initially from the British Church).

²⁹ Cassian, *De Institutis Coenobiorum*, Book 5, ed. and tr. J. C. Guy, *Jean Cassien: Institutions cénobitiques*, SC 109 (Paris, 1965), pp. 186–259; idem, *Conlationes*, Book 5, ed. E. Pichery, SC 42 (Paris, 1955), pp. 199–200; Clancy and Márkus, *Iona: The Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery*, pp. 57–8, point to echoes of the *Conferences* in the *Altus Prosator* attributed to Columba.

³⁰ See the *apparatus fontium* in Bieler's edition, *Irish Penitentials*, pp. 108–34. Cumman is likely to be the Cummine Fota whose obit is in AU s.a. 662: Bieler, *Irish Penitentials*, p. 6.

for Adomnán. A section in the poem praises Columba for his knowledge of astronomy, and in particular, the courses of the sun and moon. Astronomy was a traditional curriculum subject – later to be Charlemagne’s favourite among ‘the liberal arts’ – but the references to the sun and moon suggest that the poet had in mind Columba’s knowledge of the paschal computus. Yet Adomnán was writing at a period when the community of Columba was split on the controversial issue of the timing of the Easter festival.³¹ We shall see later quite how dangerous this dispute was. Adomnán himself was, by this date (c. 700), an adherent of the Alexandrian and Roman Easter; but the majority of his senior monks remained faithful to the Easter dating taught to the Irish by British missionaries in the fifth and sixth centuries. This traditional Easter dating had already for more than a generation been buttressed by the authority of Columba.³² Adomnán preferred to stay off the subject, except to include a prophecy made by the saint in which he foretold the division of the Irish churches because of disagreement over Easter.³³ Moreover, since the arguments over Easter stemmed more from biblical exegesis than from astronomy, Columba’s reputation as an interpreter of scripture – a favourite theme of the *Amra* – was also in question. Columba had virtually been made into a heavenly champion of the conservative party – those who were called *Hibernenses*, ‘Hibernians’ – and the central aim of Adomnán’s Life of the saint was to present a Columba who could be venerated by ‘Roman’ and ‘Hibernian’ alike, a patron who could unite rather than divide his community.

A principal message of the *Amra* was that learning and ascetic monasticism were admirable in combination. By Adomnán’s time this, too, was more problematic. His Columba was deliberately modelled on Gregory the Great’s Benedict; yet Gregory’s portrait of Benedict is one of the classic expressions of the contrary thesis, that holiness was more naturally found in someone who lacked the standard higher education of Late Antiquity. His Benedict was ‘wisely unlearned’, *sapienter indoc-tus*,³⁴ but the *Amra*’s Columba was *docht*, ‘learned’.³⁵ Gregory the Great

³¹ Bede, *HE* v.15; cf. *ibid.*, v.9 and 22, on the role of Ecgberht in persuading the *Columbae monasteria* (in the plural) and, finally, Iona itself.

³² Bede, *HE* iii.25, has Bishop Colmán declare at the Synod of Whitby ‘Surely one should not believe that our most revered father Columba and his successors, men beloved of God, who celebrated Easter in the same way, had taught or done things contrary to Scripture?’ Compare also Stephen, *Vita S. Wilfridi*, c. 10. ³³ Adomnán, *VSC* i.3.

³⁴ Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, ii. Prol. (ed. and tr. A. de Vogüé, SC 260, p. 126).

³⁵ In the compound *leigdocht* ‘learned in the law’: Stokes ‘The Bodleian *Amra*’, § 27. *Docht* is a loan from Latin *doctus*; this *docht* (as opposed to *docht* ‘tight, silent’) is not attested in later Irish, but compare Welsh *doeth*.

had high prestige among the Irish and his authority was not easy to gainsay.³⁶ The alliance between monasticism and learning championed by the Briton Gildas, and transmitted by men such as Columba's teacher, Findbarr, to Ireland, was now open to doubt. Adomnán, as a scholar-abbot who wished to change the paschal practices of 'our father Columba and his successors, men beloved of God', may have had to tread with especial care.

The approach chosen by Adomnán to solve this problem was partly given him by the nature of his material. It appears that the first abbot actively to collect stories about Columba was Ségéne (623–52).³⁷ In his day the last monks who knew Columba were dying. Since the authority of the *patronus*, the *érlam*, was central to the monastic tradition at Iona – the island monastery had a primacy among Columban houses because the saint lay buried in the cemetery – it was only natural that monks who had not known him should seek out stories when the living memory of the saint was slipping away.³⁸ What such a tradition yielded was a collection of narratives about the unusual. The ordinary painstaking routine of biblical scholarship could not, of its nature, find a place here: for both the monks who told the stories and those who listened to them it was an everyday and unremarkable practice. Adomnán, however, included an exceptional revelation, lasting three days, when Columba

was able to see openly revealed many secrets that had been hidden since the world began, while all that was most dark and difficult in the sacred Scriptures lay open, plain, and clearer than light in the sight of his most pure heart.³⁹

Such a peculiar revelation was entirely compatible with 'the wise ignorance' of a Benedict: the ascetic received a far superior knowledge by divine revelation, often conveyed by angels, than any available to the mere scholar.

Adomnán was writing, therefore, primarily for his own community and secondarily for other monks both in Ireland and in Britain.⁴⁰ His approach to Columba was governed by the needs felt by that readership c. 700. Dallán Forgaill composed his elegy primarily for laymen; he may, as the glossators asserted, have been commissioned by Áed mac

³⁶ Cumman, *De Controversia Paschali*, ed. Walsh and Ó Cróinín, lines 190–2 (where I entirely accept the editors' interpretation of the phrase 'a nobis in commune suscepti').

³⁷ Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, pp. 18, 24–5.

³⁸ For the connection between the presence of Columba's body in the monastic cemetery on Iona and the primacy of the island monastery see Bede, *HE* iii.4 ('plurima exinde monasteria . . . in quibus omnibus idem monasterium insulanum, in quo ipse requiescit corpore, principatum teneret'). ³⁹ Adomnán, *VSC* iii.18, tr. Sharpe.

⁴⁰ See, for example, the phrase 'in this island' in Adomnán, *VSC* ii.28.

Ainmirech, Columba's first-cousin-once-removed and king of Tara, since the poem itself refers to an Áed.⁴¹ What seemed remarkable to Adomnán's audience was not the ordinary life of a monk or the routine of scholarship; these were of more concern to a lay audience in 597. The *Amra* is problematic in its own right – an elegy is not a balanced obituary – but it responded to aspects of Columba's career that are of central concern to modern historians, to his scholarship and to his mission to the Picts.

(II) COLUMBA'S EDUCATION

Columba's career exhibits better than any other the way Christianity, and with it patristic Latin scholarship, was spread within the British Isles. This came as two great circular movements of men, books and ideas. The first was a clockwise movement from post-Roman Britain to Ireland, from Ireland proper to the Irish settlements in western Scotland and to the Picts, and, finally, from Iona to the English. By this circular movement British Christianity was introduced to lands never ruled by Rome and was reintroduced to areas of northern and midland Britain conquered by the English. The second, anticlockwise, movement will be discussed in the next chapter: it took Irishmen, themselves pupils of the Britons, to Gaul; from monasteries founded by Irishmen and their pupils in Gaul a further impetus was given to, among others, the English mission. Those who made the journeys that formed part of these two great movements were almost all monks. In their combination of missionary purpose and monastic ideal they gave new life to the tradition maintained by St Patrick.

Columba's father, Fedilmid, was of Cenél Conaill, brother to the Sétnae from whom the principal kings of Cenél Conaill were descended. His mother Eithne, daughter of Mac Naue, is attributed to different kindreds in the genealogies. According to one version, she came from a Leinster *gens*, the Corprige; according to another the Corprige were from Fanad (Co. Donegal); according to a third she was from a leading Leinster royal lineage, the Uí Bairrche.⁴² The truth is uncertain: mar-

⁴¹ Stokes, 'The Bodleian Amra', § 115.

⁴² Corprige of Leinster: Stokes, 'The Bodleian Amra', commentary on § 143. Uí Bairrche: *CGH* i.99. Corprige of Fanad: *CGSH* §§ 397, 651. Corpraige of Leinster: Middle Irish Life, c. 20, ed. and tr. Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, pp. 226, 243. Herbert, *ibid.*, p. 276, n. on lines 177–8 of the Middle Irish Life, says that Eithne's descent from Catháer Már is alluded to in the *Amra Choluim Chille*, § 143. This is only true if the poet was punning by putting *cathrach* (g.sg. of *cathair*, 'fortress, monastery, major church') in place of *Cathair*.

riages created and reinforced alliances and many kindreds might wish to be allied with Columba of Iona. A Leinster connection is, however, suggested by the few details recorded by Adomnán about the saint's education. A nobleman had more than one set of foster-parents – the more noble the child the more numerous the foster-parents – so Columba, offspring of a royal kindred destined for the Church, had more than one ecclesiastical foster-parent or teacher, the two roles being, as in secular life, united together.⁴³ The earliest of those recorded was a cleric called Cruithnechán;⁴⁴ when he was a deacon, Columba was taught by a priest, Gemmán, who was living in Leinster.⁴⁵ His most important teacher, however, and perhaps his last, was a bishop called Findbarr, or by the pet-names Uinniau and Finnio.⁴⁶ These names oscillate between Irish and British just as they do between full form and pet form. Two major figures of the sixth century are known to have had such fluctuating names: Finnian, the founder of Clonard, said to have died in 549, and Findbarr, founder of Movilla, Mag mBili, in Ulster (now a suburb of Newtownards), who died in 579.⁴⁷ The question of which of these two taught Columba has not yet been decided. According to some they were Britons, who would therefore have been adopted into Irish *gentes*, or perhaps fictitiously associated with those *gentes* by later tradition.⁴⁸ An attractive suggestion would make Findbarr of Movilla a man of Irish descent but belonging among those of his countrymen who had been settled in Britain.⁴⁹

On the whole, Findbarr of Movilla is more likely to have been Columba's teacher.⁵⁰ A stanza in the early ninth-century Martyrology of Óengus says that he came to Ireland 'with [scriptural] law across the wind-swept sea'.⁵¹ He is there described as a *suí*, by which is meant a

⁴³ See above, p. 112.

⁴⁴ Adomnán, *VSC* iii.2.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, ii.25.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, ii.1; iii.4.

⁴⁷ For Finnian of Clonard, see AU 549 and 776.5.

⁴⁸ The arguments for and against a British origin for one or other of these saints are canvassed by L. Fleuriot, 'Le "saint" breton Winniau et le pénitentiel dit "de Finnian"', *Etudes Celtiques*, 15 (1976–8), 607–14; D. N. Dumville, 'Gildas and Uinniau', in Lapidge and Dumville (eds.), *Gildas: New Approaches*, pp. 207–14; P. Ó Riain, 'Finnian or Winniau?', in Ní Catháin and Richter (eds.), *Die Iren und Europa*, 52–7; idem, 'Finnian and Winniau: A Question of Priority', in R. Bielmeier and R. Stempel (eds.), *Indogermanica et Caucasia: Festschrift für K. H. Schmidt zum 65. Geburtstag* (Berlin, 1994), 407–14.

⁴⁹ P. Ó Riain, 'Finnio and Winniau: A Return to the Subject' in J. Carey, J. T. Koch and P.-Y. Lambert (eds.), *Ildánach, Ildirech: A Festschrift for Proinsias Mac Cana* (Andover, Mass., 1999), pp. 187–202.

⁵⁰ None of the Irish collections of saints' lives contains his *Vita*. The only extant Life is a brief text contained in the *Legenda Nova Anglie*, ed. C. Horstman (Oxford, 1901), i. 444–7, possibly derived from Welsh sources: Kenney, *The Sources*, no. 183.

⁵¹ *Fél.*² 10 September; a similar phrase occurs at the beginning of *Immacallam Tuáin fri Finnio*, ed. J. Carey, 'Scél Tuáin meic Cairill', *Ériu*, 35 (1984), 101 (tr., p. 105); see also Carey's note, p. 107.

scriptural scholar. In the Martyrology of Tallaght, the source used by Óengus, there are two separate entries under 10 September, first Finnio maccu Fiatach and then Findbarr Maige Bili. It is likely that Óengus was working solely from the second entry, since the phrase *maccu Fiatach* would have suggested to him that Findbarr was a native of what is now Co. Down and did not come to Ireland from across the sea; also, he uses the full name-form, Findbarr, rather than the pet-name Finnio. At the beginning of the ninth century, therefore, Irish scholars may have been having difficulty reconciling two *personae* for the founder of Movilla: one was that of a member of the ruling *gens* of the Ulaid, Dál Fiatach; the other was that of a scriptural scholar from overseas. In the genealogies, Findbarr is even assigned to the same branch of Dál Fiatach as Díchu mac Trichim of Saul.⁵² Of course, these two *personae* might be reconciled, either by supposing that the foreign scholar was adopted into Dál Fiatach (full adoption was recognised in Irish law) or by supposing that a native of Ulster had gone abroad for his education.

Two earlier pieces of evidence lend further weight to these suspicions. First, Findbarr's name in his obit (very probably from the Iona annals) is *Vinnianus episcopus*. It also terms him 'son of a descendant of Fiatach', but this designation was probably added later to the original obit.⁵³ Secondly, Adomnán gives the teacher of Columba three name-forms, Findbarr, Finnio and Vinniauis, using the Irish full name, an Irish pet-name and a Latin version of a British pet-name, and calls him a bishop.⁵⁴ Finnian of Clonard is not known to have been a bishop. Unless an emendation is made to Adomnán's text, moreover, Columba's Findbarr was still alive as an old man in 563, which argues against identification with Finnian of Clonard, Finnio maccu Thelduib, who is said to have died of the great plague in 549.⁵⁵ The particular interest of the question lies partly, but not only, in the indirect light the learning of the pupil, Columba, stressed by the *Amra*, may throw on the learning of the teacher. Columbanus refers in one of his letters to correspondence between Vennianus (a variant of Vinnianus) and Gildas.⁵⁶ Since Columbanus' time at Bangor, a few miles north of Movilla, probably overlapped with the last years of Findbarr's life, it is plausible to suppose that Gildas' correspondent was the saint of Movilla.⁵⁷ A further

⁵² *CGSH* 136.1–2. On the Uí Díchon see above, pp. 65–6.

⁵³ It involves a reinterpretation of *maccu* as *macc ul*, characteristic of the Viking and post-Viking periods. ⁵⁴ Adomnán, *VSC*, i.1; ii.1; iii.4.

⁵⁵ This casts doubt on the claim advanced in the Life of Finnian of Clonard (Heist, *Vitae*, 101), that Columba had been his pupil. ⁵⁶ *Ep.* i.7 (ed. and tr. Walker, pp. 8–9).

⁵⁷ Columbanus had been a monk of Bangor for several years before he left for the continent c. 591: Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, i.4, pp. 158–9.

possibility is that Findbarr was the Vinnian who composed a penitential deriving from the British tradition of penitentials (exemplified by Gildas' penitential) and subsequently used by Columbanus.⁵⁸ The upshot, then, is that Findbarr was probably from Britain, although he may have been Irish; that his learning was derived partly from Britain and was reflected in enduring British contacts; that he was the teacher of Columba and influenced Columbanus; and, finally, that he made Movilla one of the major episcopal churches of Ulster.⁵⁹ He may have been the last great ecclesiastical leader from Britain in sixth-century Ireland.

(III) THE FOUNDATION OF IONA

Columba decided in his early forties to leave Ireland and go to Britain as a *peregrinus*. He may not have visited Ireland again until the last years of his life. The part of Britain to which he came – the modern Argyll – had been settled by the Irish and formed part of the kingdom of Dál Riata that straddled the North Channel between north-eastern Ireland and the Mull of Kintyre. This Irish settlement may have been comparatively recent in 563: in one of the seventh-century poems on Columba ascribed to Béccán mac Luigdech, the new territory in Britain is described as 'the land of Erc', namely of Erc mac Echdach, the father of the traditional leaders of the colonists;⁶⁰ the *floruit* of these sons appears to have been in the late fifth century.⁶¹ Columba, therefore, may have left Ireland but he had not left the Irish.

Three questions can be asked about the circumstances in which Iona was founded, questions which can only elicit reasoned guesses in answer

⁵⁸ Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, p. 4, refuses to choose, though his footnote (4) inclines towards Finnian of Clonard; but the connection between Finnian, Sinell and Comgall, on which he appears to rely (*Vita S. Finniani*, c. 19, ed. Heist, *Vitae*, p. 101 = *De Tribus Ordinibus*, c. 5, ed. Heist, p. 83), only mentions another Sinell, and is later propaganda on behalf of Clonard. As for Comgall, Bieler may have confused Fintan of Cluain Ednech, the teacher of Comgall (*Vita S. Comgalli*, c. 3; Plummer, *Vitae*, ii.4) with Finnian of Clonard: T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'The Penitential of Columbanus', in Lapidge (ed.), *Columbanus: Studies on the Latin Writings*, pp. 219–25.

⁵⁹ *CGSH* 729.1, shows Findbarr (Finnian) of Movilla as the principal saint of the Ulaid. In the list of northern Irish ecclesiastics given in Bede, *HE* ii.19, Movilla and Nendrum are probably the only churches represented from the territory of the Ulaid (excluding the Cruithni): see Plummer's note *ad loc.*, *Baedae Opera Historica*, ii.112–13.

⁶⁰ *Tuighraind Bhécáin*, ed. and tr. Kelly, *Ériu*, 26 (1975), st. 11.

⁶¹ To judge by the obits of Gabrán and Comgall, sons of Domongart (558/61 and 538), the 505 obit of their father in AT (or abdication in 507 according to AU) should be approximately correct, whereas the other obit given under 466 (AT) must be too early. An entry in AT under a year corresponding to AU 501 records the migration of the Dál Riata being led by Fergus mac Eirc. The entry is plainly not contemporary and to judge by the obits of Fergus' grandsons, Gabrán and Comgall, may be as much as fifty years too late. See Bannerman, *Studies in the History of Dalriata*, pp. 73–8, who is, however, inclined to accept a date c. 500.

but are nevertheless worth posing. Why did the foundation occur in 563, when Columba was already in his forties? Why did Columba choose the British part of Dál Riata in which to establish his monastery? And, finally, why was Iona, in particular, chosen?

The historical context offers a possible answer to the first question.⁶² We may begin with an annal, placed either in 558 or in 560, which combined three events: the last 'Feast of Tara' celebrated by Diarmait mac Cerbaill of the southern Uí Néill; the death of Gabrán mac Domongairt, king of Dál Riata, and the flight, probably of the Irish settlers in Argyll, before Bruide mac Máelchon, king of the Picts. The Feast of Tara came to an end with Diarmait mac Cerbaill, probably because of its pagan overtones.⁶³ This is not to say that Diarmait was a pagan, but rather that a now-triumphant Christianity is likely to have included people determined to abolish such highly public remnants of a pre-Christian past.⁶⁴ In 561 Diarmait attempted to crush a hostile alliance consisting of the northern Uí Néill, Cenél nÉogain and Cenél Conaill, and the Connachta. The site of the battle, Cúl Dreimne, may have been within the later kingdom of Cenél Coirpri Dromma Clíab, around Sligo.⁶⁵ If so, Diarmait was on the offensive and had placed his army astride the narrow coastal strip linking the northern Uí Néill with the Connachta. He was, however, defeated; two of the victors, Forgas and Domnall, both of Cenél nÉogain, would succeed Diarmait in 565. Their father, Muirchertach mac Ercae, had been king of Tara but had been killed in 536. Forgas and Domnall, and also their ally from Cenél Conaill, Ainmuire mac Sétnai, were all dead by the end of the 560s. The most likely interpretation is that one major reason for the conflict was the issue of the succession to Diarmait as king of Tara.⁶⁶ If the latter (from the southern Uí Néill) was attempting to remove these two northern cousins from the position of joint-heirs apparent (*tánaisi ríge*), they would have had good reason to rebel.

The battle seems to have settled the dispute among the Uí Néill.

⁶² On what follows, see F. J. Byrne, 'The Ireland of St Columba', *Irish Historical Studies*, 5, ed. J. L. Mc Cracken (London, 1965), 37–58.

⁶³ Binchy, 'The Fair of Tailtiu and the Feast of Tara', 134–7.

⁶⁴ Cf. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity*, pp. 112–21, 128–35, for similar tensions elsewhere.

⁶⁵ Hogan, *Onom.*, pp. 319–20.

⁶⁶ AU's entry, 'Cath Cuile Dreimne', 560.3 (as it stands, a doublet of 561.1), may be the remnant of the corresponding entry in AT, left by careless abbreviation of a longer version. The AT entry says that one of the reasons for the battle was the killing by Diarmait of Curnán, son of the Connaught king Áed mac Echach Tirmcharna, while Curnán was under Columba's protection. The entry is in Irish (a suggestion but not a proof that it is late) and the reference to Columba suggests that it may be part of the saga that grew up about Cúl Dreimne and the exile of Columba.

Whereas Iona tradition was naturally hostile to Diarmait so far as the battle of Cúl Dreimne was concerned, the situation was quite the reverse when it came to the killing of Diarmait in 565. To appreciate the implications of that event, however, we need to look first at the battle of Móin Daire Lothair (or Ondemmone), fought, according to Adomnán, shortly after Columba's voyage.⁶⁷ Although this battle occurred while Diarmait was still king of Tara, it was fought by the same northern Uí Néill kings who had defeated him at Cúl Dreimne two years earlier. Their opponents were the Cruithni of north-eastern Ireland, neighbours of Dál Riata. Adomnán's account implies that Conall mac Comgaill, king of Dál Riata, was not involved in the battle on either side. The annals say that two Cruithnian peoples fought with the northern Uí Néill and had offered the latter overlordship over Ard Éolarg and Lee (respectively, the area around Magilligan on the east side of Lough Foyle and the district on the west side of the Bann south of Coleraine). This version indicates, therefore, that the battle extended Uí Néill territorial control eastwards to the River Bann, and that the two Cruithnian allies of the Uí Néill must thus have come from east of the Bann.

In 565 Diarmait mac Cerbaill was murdered by Áed Dub, ruler of what would later be the most powerful Cruithnian kingdom, Mag Line. According to the fuller version of the entry to be found in the Annals of Tigernach and *Chronicum Scotorum*, Diarmait was killed in Ráith Becc in Mag Line.⁶⁸ He appears, therefore, to have been Áed Dub's guest, enjoying the hospitality due from a client-king to his overlord. The implication is that the victory of his northern Uí Néill cousins at Móin Daire Lothair had, if anything, strengthened his authority as king of Tara. Hence, some settlement must have been made after the battle of Cúl Dreimne, a settlement that probably included confirmation of the status of Domnall and Forgus as joint heirs-apparent. The victory over the Cruithni would thus have been won by branches of the Uí Néill which, although recently in opposition, were now loyal supporters of Diarmait mac Cerbaill as king of Tara. This change in their standpoint explains why Diarmait's death in 565 was remembered on Iona so differently from his defeat two years earlier.

Columba's voyage to Britain appears to have taken him first to Conall mac Comgaill, king of Dál Riata. Conall had succeeded his uncle in 560; two events in the annals for that year, apart from the entry on the last

⁶⁷ AU 563; Adomnán, *VSC* i.7.

⁶⁸ J 183 873, in the townland of Rathbeg in the parish of Donegore.

Feast of Tara, were the death of Gabrán mac Domongairt and the flight of Dál Riata before the Pictish king, Bruide mac Máelchon. Perhaps Bruide had taken advantage of Gabrán's death to mount his attack. So far as we can tell, therefore, the voyage of Columba took place when Conall was politically weak but Columba's own kinsmen were in a strong position that would become still more dominating with the battle of Móin Daire Lothair later the same year. It is hardly likely that, if Conall mac Comgaill had been an ally of the Cruithni, a cousin of one of the victorious kings in that battle, Ainmuire mac Sétnai, would have come to Conall only a month or two before the battle asking for his patronage. To judge by the annals, neither Dál Riata nor the Ulaid, the other two main powers of the province of Ulster, gave any help to the Cruithni.

Columba, then, sailed to Britain when his kinsmen were enjoying military victory and the prospect of succession to Díarmait mac Cerbaill. Conall mac Comgaill would probably have been sounded out before someone of such high political rank as Columba came to his kingdom. Whether it was already understood that Columba would make an approach as a missionary to the Picts, also recent victors, is unknown; if the argument to be presented below is accepted, even this possibility will appear plausible. The time was favourable for Columba's voyage, partly because of the strong backing he could expect from his royal cousins, partly because Conall mac Comgaill was, in any case, unlikely to wish to offend them.

Iona was probably close to the northern frontier of Conall's kingdom, which is unlikely to have extended further north than Ardnamurchan.⁶⁹ Its centre of power in Conall's time was in the south, in Kintyre and in Cowal, extending as far north as mid-Argyll. The relatively fertile Islay was also within the core of the kingdom. By Adomnán's time there was a clear distinction between four ruling kingdoms: Cenél Loairn, who gave their name to Lorne, around Oban, were in the north;⁷⁰ Cenél nGabráin were in Kintyre;⁷¹ Cenél Comgaill were probably in the district to which they gave their name, Cowal, to the east of Loch Fyne and thus eastern neighbours of Cenél nGabráin; Cenél nÓengusa may have held lands on Islay.⁷² In Columba's time some of these distinct branches of the royal lineage were barely in their infancy: the king, Conall mac

⁶⁹ Bannerman, *Studies in the History of Dalriada*, pp. 113–14.

⁷⁰ Cf. Adomnán, *VSC* ii.45.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, ii.22.

⁷² *CGH* i.426 (*LL* 336 b 43 ff.) is a fragment of the text preserved more fully in Dublin, TCD MS no. 1928 (H 2. 7), and edited by Bannerman, *Studies in the History of Dalriada*, pp. 65–6; see also p. 42, lines 46–7, and pp. 108–15.

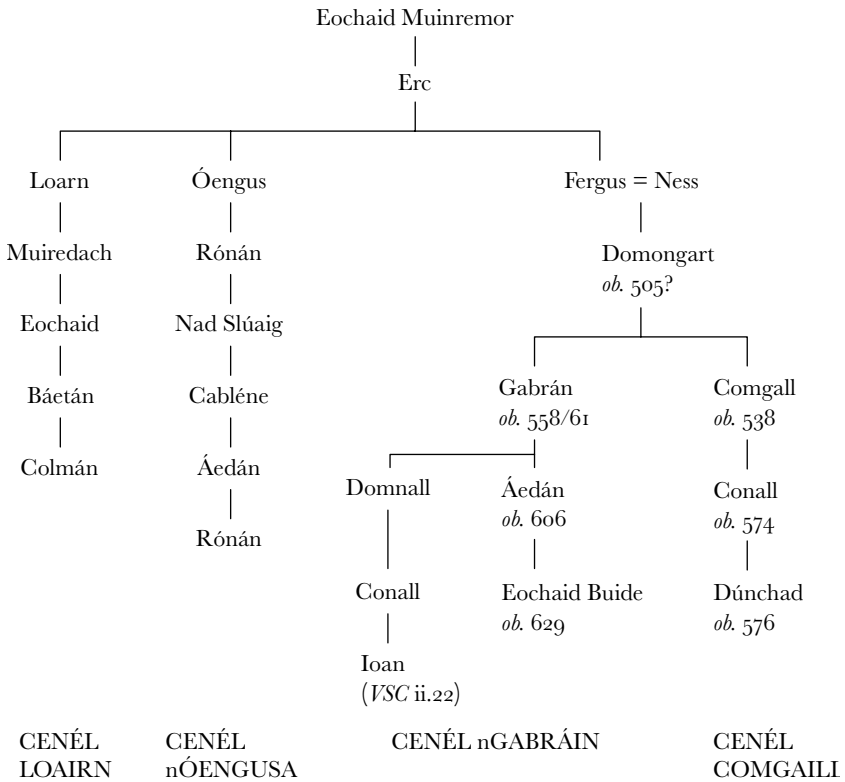


Fig. 7.1. Dál Riata to c. 630

Comgaill, was the son of the Comgall who gave his name to Cenél Comgaill; Conall's predecessor, Gabrán, gave his name to Cenél nGabráin. The split between these two (descendants of Domongart son of Fergus Mór) and both Cenél Loairn and Cenél nÓengusa occurred earlier, so that it is correct to think of Cenél Loairn and Cenél nÓengusa as distinct entities in Columba's time (see fig. 7.1).⁷³ Towards the end of Columba's life, however, Cenél nGabráin had emerged as a distinct *fine*, as shown by the position of Ioan in the genealogy (fig. 7.1), in the fourth generation beginning with Gabrán. Cenél Comgaill remained politically aligned with Cenél nGabráin and was sometimes subsumed as part of it.⁷⁴

⁷³ The following is based on the genealogies ed. Bannerman, *Studies in the History of Dalriada*, pp. 65–6. For more detailed genealogical diagrams, see *ibid.* pp. 69–71.

⁷⁴ As in the *Senchas Fer nAlban*, ed. Bannerman, *Studies in the History of Dalriada*, p. 42, lines 46–7.

Mull and Iona are likely to have belonged to the northern area of Cenél Loairn.⁷⁵ The annals, therefore, in representing Conall mac Comgaill as the donor of Iona to Columba, were assuming that an overking could grant land within the territory of a client-king. Such an assumption is by no means without parallel: for example, at very much the same time as Adomnán was writing, Cloyne, within the territory of the Uí Líatháin, maintained that its land was granted by a king of Éoganacht Glendamnach.⁷⁶ One interpretation of the emergence of Tír Cell 'Land of Churches' from an originally very extensive kingdom of Cenél Fiachach is that the leading rulers among the Uí Néill took care to reduce the resources of a dangerous rival dynasty by granting away lands to churches in its territory.⁷⁷ The same tactic may have been used in 563.

Once one recognises the effectiveness of communications by sea, it becomes evident that Iona, though about as marginal a place as one could find within the Irish-speaking world in 563, was not at all marginal provided one were thinking in terms of Ireland and Britain, not simply the Irish. This is, indeed, one of the strongest arguments for thinking that the prospects of a mission to the Picts were not absent from Columba's mind when he sailed for Britain. The sea gave access to Ireland and to the Pictish territories north of Ardnarmurchan.⁷⁸ With the Firth of Lorne and Loch Linnhe it gave access to the Great Glen and thus to northern Pictland.⁷⁹ From Cenél Loairn territory opposite Mull and Iona, Columba could travel east, through the Pass of Brander, to the lands of the southern Picts.⁸⁰ By using the 'crossing-over' point at Tarbert, access was given to Loch Fyne and so to the Firth of Clyde and the British territory of Strathclyde, ruled by Columba's friend, Rhydderch Hael.⁸¹

A prerequisite both for Dál Riata and for Iona was a long and assured tradition of seamanship in the dangerous Hebridean waters, subject to fierce storms as well as to strong tidal currents and eddies. Iona seems to have recruited experienced seamen into the monastic community. Pious images of individual monks voyaging widely in small boats only fit for

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 114.

⁷⁶ 'Conall Corc and the Corco Luigde', ed. K. Meyer, in O. J. Bergin *et al.*, *Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts*, 3 (Halle, 1910), p. 62, lines 8–11. ⁷⁷ See above, pp. 28, and below, pp. 554–5.

⁷⁸ Adomnán, *VSC* i. 33; ii.26.

⁷⁹ Ibid., ii.20 (Loch Linnhe), 33, 34 (Columba used a boat to travel along Loch Ness); similarly i.34 (Loch Lochy).

⁸⁰ Ibid., i.31, shows that Columba had a dependent monastery on Loch Awe, in Irish territory but east of the Pass of Brander. ⁸¹ Ibid., i.15.

one or two persons are to be avoided.⁸² Columba's Iona could not have flourished without professional seamen and relatively large ships; Adomnán's *Life of St Columba* offers good evidence for both.⁸³

Finally, however, Iona is relatively fertile land, with a lower rainfall than areas on the eastern side of the mountains of Mull. A short voyage to Tiree, where Columba had a dependent monastery at Mag Luinge, gave the community a share in the produce of one of the most fertile areas in the Hebrides. Presumably the previous inhabitants of Iona were offered the possibility of becoming members of the community, *familia*, of Columba, but some at least must have been displaced by the monastic buildings themselves.

(IV) COLUMBA AND THE PICTS

There are two principal modern views about Columba's relationship with the Picts; the choice between them has implications for one's understanding of Columba's whole life.

The first is derived from Bede's narrative of the foundation of Iona.⁸⁴ Columba came to Britain, he says,

to preach the word of God to the provinces of the northern Picts . . . In the ninth year of the reign of Bridei son of Meilochon he converted that people to the faith of Christ by his preaching and example; for that reason he also received from them the aforesaid island [of Iona] on which to found a monastery.

This account is patently derived from Pictish sources: the regnal chronology is Pictish, while the assertion that the Picts gave Iona to Columba as a response to his successful mission is contradicted by the Irish annals, themselves supported, in part at least, by Adomnán.⁸⁵ Bede's account is thus open to doubt, not least because it requires the foundation of Iona to be dated after a major and successful missionary expedition to convert the northern Picts; this is contradicted by one set of Irish annals, which say that Columba sailed to Iona, and not just to Britain, in 563.⁸⁶ In this

⁸² The three Irishmen of Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, s.a. 891, are an exception.

⁸³ Bannerman, *Studies in the History of Dalriada*, pp. 148–54. ⁸⁴ Bede, *HE* iii.4.

⁸⁵ AU 574.2; Adomnán, *VSC* i.7; M. Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, pp. 28–9; A. A. M. Duncan, 'Bede, Iona, and the Picts', in R. H. C. Davis and J. M. Wallace-Hadrill (eds.), *The Writing of History in the Middle Ages: Essays Presented to R. W. Southern* (Oxford, 1981), 9–11. D. P. Kirby, 'Bede and the Pictish Church', *Innes Review*, 24 (1973), 6–25, esp. 21–3, is inclined to think that the story about Ninian's mission to the southern Picts may have come from the Niduari Picts rather than from Whithorn, as he had maintained previously; 'Bede's Native Sources for the *Historia Ecclesiastica*', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 48 (1965–6), 350.

⁸⁶ The Clonmacnois annals, AT and CS, under a year corresponding to AU 563. Cf. Smyth, *Warlords*, p. 100; Sharpe, *Adomnán: Life of Saint Columba*, 18–19.

chapter, Bede also says that the southern Picts, to the south of the mountains, had much earlier been converted by Nynias, a Briton.⁸⁷

The other modern view was advanced by Kathleen Hughes in a notably lucid lecture.⁸⁸ This may best be approached by juxtaposing it with the work of Isabel Henderson on Pictish art, and Julian Brown on the Lindisfarne and Durham Gospels and the Book of Kells, but first of all we need a brief survey of early Pictish sculpture which provides some crucial evidence.

Surviving examples of Pictish sculpture are centred in two areas divided by 'Monoth', the range of mountains running eastwards almost to the sea a little to the south of Aberdeen and separating the northern Picts from their southern fellow-countrymen. When Bede referred to the northern and southern Picts, he made it clear that they were divided by these mountains.⁸⁹ The areas in which the sculpture is found correspond closely to the main regions of Pictish power in the period between the sixth and ninth centuries. For that reason, there can be little doubt that the sculpture is Pictish; indeed, in the virtual absence of native Pictish written sources, the stones constitute the principal evidence for the culture of that people.⁹⁰

Modern scholars have introduced a typological distinction among the Pictish stones, dividing them into two classes. Class I consists of roughly dressed or undressed stones with a range of animal and other stereotyped symbols such as the crescent with the V-shaped rod. Class II stones are carefully dressed and typically bear a cross on one side, usually accompanied by other images, and on the other side one or more of the symbols found on the Class I stones. The images on the Class I stones were made by incision; those on Class II stones were usually cut in relief. Since the presence or absence of a cross is an important distinguishing feature between the two classes, Class I is seen by most scholars as pre-Christian, Class II as Christian.

⁸⁷ P. Hill, *Whithorn and St Ninian: The Excavation of a Monastic Town, 1984-91* (Stroud, 1997), chap. 1; for place-name evidence for Northern British influence on the conversion of the southern Picts, see G. W. S. Barrow, 'The Childhood of Scottish Christianity: A Note on some Place-Name Evidence', *Scottish Studies*, 27 (1983), 1-15.

⁸⁸ K. W. Hughes, *Early Christianity in Pictland*, Jarrow Lecture, 1970 (Jarrow, 1971); repr. in her *Celtic Britain in the Early Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 1980), pp. 1-16. ⁸⁹ Bede, *HE* iii.4.

⁹⁰ The standard authority remains J. R. Allen and J. Anderson, *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1903; repr. in 2 vols. Balgavies, Angus, 1993); see also E. H. Nicoll (ed.), *A Pictish Panorama: The Story of the Picts and a Pictish Bibliography* (Balgavies, Angus, 1995), which has a full bibliography and several helpful introductory essays; A. Mack, *Field Guide to the Pictish Symbol Stones* (Balgavies, Angus, 1997), is an invaluable aid to finding the present location of stones and also has good distribution maps.

Arguing partly from the silence of Adomnán, and partly from the supposed pre-Christian character of the Class I stones, Hughes maintained that Bede's account of the conversion of the Picts was false: Columba did not convert the northern Picts; indeed, the Picts as a whole were little touched by Christianity until the eighth century.⁹¹ What made the decisive break with the pagan past represented by the Class I stones was a rapprochement with Northumbria initiated by Nechtan son of Derilei about 710.⁹² The effective external force behind the Christianisation of the Pictish aristocracy, and therefore behind the Class II stones, was Northumbria, not Iona or Dál Riata or Ireland. Supporting evidence is drawn, for example, from the resemblance of some interlace on the cross-slab in Aberlemno churchyard in Angus to the interlace on the carpet page on fo. 26v of the Lindisfarne Gospels.⁹³ The Pictish elements in the insular Gospel Books all testify to the interchange between Pictland and Northumbria; they, as much as comparisons with metalwork from Sutton Hoo, argue that Northumbria, and not Iona or Ireland, was the principal centre in the development of Insular art. This was not because Northumbria was the ultimate source of many motifs, but rather it was the central meeting-place, where elements of a complex style derived from Ireland and Pictland, from British and Anglo-Saxon metalwork, and from the Continent were combined together.

The historical element in this reconstruction is vulnerable on a number of counts. First, the Class I stones may not be distinctively Christian, but they are not known to be distinctively pagan either. Again, if the Picts were not unambiguously Christian in the third quarter of the seventh century, it is remarkable that Stephen, speaking in his *Life of Wilfrid* of Ecgrith's attacks on the Picts in the 670s, is happy to describe them as bestial but never so much as hints that they may be pagan.⁹⁴ Wilfrid is said to have exercised episcopal power over Picts, but he is never said to have converted them – and this is the man who, so Stephen claims, initiated the conversion of the Frisians and converted the South

⁹¹ Bede, *HE* iii.4. ⁹² *Ibid.*, v.21.

⁹³ Allen and Anderson, *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*, part iii, pp. 209–14 (in the reprint see p. 217). If the battle scene represents the Pictish victory over the Northumbrian army of Ecgrith in 685 (Nechtansmere or Dunnichen Moss), as suggested by its situation on or very close to the battlefield (Mack, *Field Guide to the Pictish Symbol Stones*, p. 61), this stone is important dating evidence, and would very probably be earlier than the Lindisfarne Gospels: see I. Henderson, *The Picts* (London, 1967), p. 216 (note on Plate 28).

⁹⁴ Stephen, *Vita S. Wilfridi*, ed. W. Levison, MGH SRM vi (Hanover, 1896), c. 19.

Saxons.⁹⁵ Bede also gives his readers to understand that Pictland was Christian when, in or shortly after 616, it gave hospitality to at least one exiled Bernician prince, probably Eanfrith.⁹⁶ The close relationship between Iona and the Picts at the end of the seventh century and the beginning of the eighth is demonstrated by the appearance of the Pictish king Bridei (Bruide), son of Derilei, as a signatory to the Law of Adomnán in 697, and also by Ceolfrith's letter to his brother Nechtan; the latter appeals to the example of Adomnán in such a way as to imply some existing allegiance felt by Nechtan to Iona.⁹⁷ Hughes discounts the evidence of the *Amra Choluimb Chille*, basing herself on the late nineteenth-century dating of the poem to c. 800.⁹⁸ This is crucial for the *Amra* refers to Columba teaching the peoples of the Tay, namely the Picts; but most scholars, as we have seen, would now regard it as an authentic composition on the occasion of, or soon after, Columba's death in 597.

There is also an art-historical problem. The distribution of Class II stones is mainly southern Pictish, that is, south of Monoth. Yet within southern Pictland the concentration is very much to the north of the Tay.⁹⁹ The southernmost provinces of Fortriu and Fib (Fife) largely lack stones. Yet these were the very provinces most likely to have been controlled by the Northumbrians before the battle of Nechtanesmere in 685, a battle in which Ecgrith, the Northumbrian king, lost his life.¹⁰⁰ If, then, the art of the Class II stones bears witness to close contacts between Christian Picts and Christian Northumbrians, there must be a reason why Class II stones are rare south of the Tay. According to Hughes, this is because the Pictish aristocracy was not effectively Christian until the eighth century, well after Northumbrian power over the southern Pictish provinces had come to an end. The explanation is

⁹⁵ Ibid., cc. 21, 26, 41. Similarly, Kirby points to the connections between Melrose and the Picts in the days when Cuthbert was still at Melrose: 'Bede and the Pictish Church', 10–11, 21–2. The account in the Anonymous Life of St Cuthbert, ii.4, and in Bede's Life of St Cuthbert, c. 11 (ed. and tr. Colgrave, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, pp. 82–5, 192–5), does not suggest that missionary work was the purpose of Cuthbert's journey to the Picts. ⁹⁶ Bede, *HE* iii.1.

⁹⁷ *Cáin Adomnáin*, § 28, p. 20, where Bruide mac Derilei, 'king of the Pictish peoples', is no. 91 in the list of guarantors: Ni Dhonnchada, 'The Guarantor-List of *Cáin Adomnáin*', 214; Bede, *HE* v.21.

⁹⁸ J. Strachan, 'The Date of the *Amra Choluimb Chille*', *RC*, 17 (1896), 41–4, was writing before the antiquity of suffixed object pronouns had been demonstrated, and when it was believed that the simple preterite was later than the *ro*-preterite. In addition to the strictly linguistic evidence, Strachan also thought that a poem with such evident concern for Latin learning could not be early.

⁹⁹ Allen and Anderson, *Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*, pp. ciii–civ, cviii, 6–7; see also the distribution map in Mack, *Field Guide to the Pictish Symbol Stones*, pp. xii–xiii.

¹⁰⁰ Bede, *HE* iv.26/24. The Annals of Ulster place both this battle and the attack by Ecgrith on Brega one year later than Bede; cf. K. Harrison, 'The Reign of King Ecgrith of Northumbria', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 43 (1971), 527–33.

ingenious, but unsatisfactory. It implies that there is no good historical context for the clear Pictish influence to be seen in the lion symbol in the Book of Durrow (closely similar to a lion on a cross-slab from Papil, Burra, in the Shetlands).¹⁰¹ The Book of Durrow is generally dated *c.* 675, in the very period when Northumbrian domination of the Picts reached its height;¹⁰² its debt, however, is to the Class I stones, and these are mainly concentrated around the Moray Firth and in Aberdeenshire.¹⁰³ The geographical range of artistic contact between Northumbria and the Picts thus appears to have been wider before 700 than it was later with the Class II stones, for the latter are principally concentrated in southern Pictland as far south as the Tay. The history of the conversion proposed by Hughes cannot therefore explain the Book of Durrow. The evidence of the Class I stones – and, in particular, of the close affinities between some of the animal carvings and some symbols of the evangelists in some of the great Insular Gospel Books – now starts to point in a quite different direction, away from and not towards Northumbria. If the Class I stones are still to be dated to the seventh century rather than to the eighth, they belong to the period when the chief connections of the Pictish Church were indisputably with Dál Riata to the west and with Ireland. Iona, and not Northumbria, would then appear to be the natural place at which the links could be made between manuscript painting and stone carving.¹⁰⁴

A rejection of Hughes' argument does not entail simple acceptance of the traditional account, based on Bede, who himself took his information partly from Pictish sources. Bede's account can be corrected by the much earlier testimony of the *Amra*, inasmuch as the latter suggests that Columba worked among the southern as well as the northern Picts. Yet in spite of very different geographical standpoints, Bede's later Pictish narrative and the near-contemporary poem are united in perceiving Columba as a missionary to the Picts.

Even apart from the evidence of the *Amra* and the Irish annals, there are grounds for doubting elements in Bede's account. He asserted that Columba only converted the northern Picts, those north of Monoth.

¹⁰¹ *Evangeliorum Quattuor Codex Durmachensis*, ed. A. A. Luce *et al.* (Olten, 1960), f. 191^v, but the commentary, ii.131–2, fails to mention the Pictish parallel; Allen and Anderson, *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*, part iii, pp. 10–15; further bibliography in Nicoll (ed.), *A Pictish Panorama*, p. 161.

¹⁰² G. Henderson, *From Durrow to Kells: The Insular Gospel Books, 650–800* (London, 1987), pp. 54–5; *Evangeliorum Quattuor Codex Durmachensis*, p. 95.

¹⁰³ Allen and Anderson, *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*, p. ciii.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. G. Henderson, *From Durrow to Kells*, pp. 55, 95–6.

The southern Picts had long since been converted by Nynias (Ninian), a Briton associated with the church of Whithorn in Galloway.¹⁰⁵ When Bede was writing, Whithorn was within the kingdom of Northumbria and had received an English bishop, Pehthelm, who was still living in 731.¹⁰⁶ Unfortunately, Bede's information about Ninian, probably received, at least in part, from Pehthelm, is as problematic as his information about Columba and the Picts.¹⁰⁷ In his Preface Bede is quite open in stating that he considers it to be his purpose to pass on stories which will be pleasing, when published in his History, to those who supplied Bede with the information.¹⁰⁸ Bede thus had no compunction in giving information that he could not himself substantiate, provided that he did not know it to be untrue. The stories of both Columba's conversion of the northern Picts and Ninian's conversion of the southern Picts bear the hallmark of narrative that would please those who supplied the information. Ninian is said by Bede to have been educated at Rome (and here Bede uses language suggesting that Ninian was sound on the Easter question).¹⁰⁹ Yet no mention of Ninian was made in Ceolfrith's letter to Naiton, king of the Picts, suggesting that the story was not known in Wearmouth-Jarrow *c.* 710.

Admittedly, its restriction of Columba's missionary activities to the northern Picts may seem to be borne out by Adomnán's stories of miracles accomplished by Columba at, or near, a fort occupied by Bruide mac Máelchon close to Inverness. But Bruide was a powerful ruler to judge by his victory, apparently over Dál Riata, in 558.¹¹⁰ Adomnán shows him as overlord of the king of the Orkneys, suggesting that he was overking of all the Picts. Moreover, Bede also appears to have regarded Bruide as king of all the Picts: for him, Bruide, 'a most

¹⁰⁵ C. Thomas, *Whithorn's Christian Beginnings*, First Whithorn Lecture (Whithorn, 1992), pp. 13–18. Duncan, 'Bede, Iona and the Picts', argues, to my mind unconvincingly, that Bede's information came from the Ecgbert who was to convert the monks of Iona to the Roman Easter; J. MacQueen, *St Nynia: A Study of Literary and Linguistic Evidence* (Edinburgh, 1961), esp. 22–3, argues that Whithorn was the sole source for the story of the mission to Pictland.

¹⁰⁶ Bede, *HE* v.23; Pehthelm, a former pupil of Aldhelm of Malmesbury, was one of Bede's informants, as shown by the last sentence of v.14 and the story about Haeddi in v. 18. The first element in his name is the Old English form of 'Pict'; but this is quite common, as is the element *wealh*, otherwise reserved for non-Germanic people whose ancestors had been within the Roman Empire.

¹⁰⁷ D. Broun, 'The Literary Record of St Nynia: Fact or Fiction?', *Innes Review*, 42 (1991), 143–50; for Duncan's views on Ecgbert as a source for Bede, see his 'Bede, Iona, and the Picts', 22–3, 27, 30–1; Duncan follows, in part at least, Kirby, 'Bede and the Pictish Church', 21–3.

¹⁰⁸ Bede, *HE*, Praef.: 'ut qui de singulis prouinciis siue locis sublimioribus, quae memoratu digna atque incolis grata credideram, diligenter adnotare curauim, apud omnes fructum piaae intercessionis inueniam'. ¹⁰⁹ Cf. the description of Rónán in *HE* iii.25.

¹¹⁰ An alternative date, 560, is also given in AU, but the 558 entry is in Latin, suggesting that it is the older of the two.

powerful king', who 'ruled over the Picts', gave Iona to Columba.¹¹¹ An approach by Columba to him near Inverness does not, therefore, imply any lack of missionary activity among the southern Picts. Here, the eighth-century evidence is of little weight set against the references in the *Amra*. The first occurs fairly early in the poem in a series of lines on the loss to 'us' – the Irish, or, more particularly, the Uí Néill¹¹² – brought about by Columba's death. 'We' no longer have 'the teacher who used to teach the peoples of the Tay.'¹¹³ The second reference occurs much later in a sequence of lines mentioning kings associated with Columba: his kinsman, Áed mac Ainmirech, king of Tara, and a Conall, perhaps to be identified with Conall mac Comgaill, the king of Dál Riata, by then dead, who gave Iona to Columba.¹¹⁴ To these it adds the line, 'He subdued them with a blessing – the arrogant ones who surrounded the great king of the Tay.'¹¹⁵ The mention of the Tay in both lines may perhaps suggest an overlord of all the Picts whose own kingdom was either Fortriu (Strathearn and the lower Tay) or Athfótlá (Atholl, the upper Tay).¹¹⁶ Just as Adomnán – infuriatingly for modern historians – was not concerned to say whether Columba succeeded in converting Bruide, so the *Amra* implies that Columba was effective in preaching to Bruide's household but does not claim outright that he converted the king. Both Adomnán's miracle stories in which Columba defeated the druid Broíchán, who was also Bruide's foster-father, and the *Amra*'s reference to the saint subduing 'the mouths of the arrogant ones who surrounded the great king' embody the perception that the king could be won over if enough of the great men close to him were also persuaded. Those counsellors who were themselves the most influential advisers needed to be either won over or defeated in debate. The *Amra*, therefore, envisages Columba triumphing in debate before 'the great king of the Tay'.

When the *Amra* is put together with Bede's story about Columba and Ninian, it becomes likely that Columba did indeed convert Bruide. Bede apparently has two stories.¹¹⁷ The first (namely the first paragraph of chapter 4 of Book iii) is dated by the accession of the emperor Justin

¹¹¹ Bede, *HE* iii.4: 'Uenit autem Britanniam Columba, regnante Pictis Bridio filio Meilochon, rege potentissimo, nono anno regni eius, gentemque illam uerbo et exemplo ad fidem Christi conuertit; unde et praefatam insulam ab eis in possessionem monasterii faciendi accepit.'

¹¹² For them cf. Stokes, 'The Bodleian *Amra*', § 16. ¹¹³ *Ibid.*, § 18.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, §§ 115, 118. ¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, § 119.

¹¹⁶ Cf. M. O. Anderson, *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1973), pp. 144–5; but D. P. Kirby, '... per universas Pictorum provincias', in G. Bonner (ed.), *Famulus Christi*, pp. 307–11, sees Bridei mac Máelchon as based in the north.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Duncan, 'Bede, Iona, and the Picts', 27–32, for a different account.

II,¹¹⁸ and it minimises Columba's achievement by restricting it to the northern Picts, reserving the southern Picts for an earlier mission by Ninian; this may be the version according to Whithorn. The second, dated by a Pictish regnal year, is the one that speaks of Bruide as king of the Picts and of Columba converting 'that people' (*gentemque illam*), namely the Picts; this is the story which appears to come from the Picts themselves and not from Whithorn. Reading in the light of the first story, one might assume that by 'Picts' Bede meant only the northern Picts, but that is not the natural interpretation of this section of his narrative, taken on its own. What Bede therefore continues to allow Columba (in both these stories), namely a successful conversion, agrees with the testimony of the *Amra*, while the second story, the one from Pictish sources, does not contradict the *Amra* at all. That Dallán Forgaill would have made so much of Columba's relationship with the great king of the Tay if Bruide had remained a pagan seems unlikely.

The annals offer enough basis to make a suggestion about the period in which the mission occurred. Bruide died in 584; the years after his death probably saw Columba's foundation of Durrow and possibly also Derry.¹¹⁹ These were also years in which his kinsman, Áed mac Ainmirech, was king of Tara, so facilitating the saint's activities within Ireland. In Scotland, however, the years from 580 onwards seem to have been dominated by the military ambitions of Áedán mac Gabráin, who succeeded Conall mac Comgaill in 574. Áedán's expeditions were mainly at the expense of the Picts, whereas the early years of Columba's residence on Iona are likely to have coincided with the apogee of Bruide's power.¹²⁰ The approach to Bruide is, therefore, best dated within the reign of Conall mac Comgaill, the king who gave Iona to Columba, rather than within the reign of his successor, Áedán mac Gabráin. An early dating, at a period when Bruide may have been overlord of Dál Riata, will help to explain the genesis of Bede's story that Bruide gave Iona to Columba as a reward for his preaching.

The story of Ninian, however suspect in its existing form, may also have had a basis in fact. For one thing the place-name evidence indicates British participation in the conversion of the southern Picts.¹²¹ One possible explanation begins from the generally good relations between Dál

¹¹⁸ This is not in Bede, *Chron. Maj.*, ed. Th. Mommsen, *Chronica Minora Saec. IV, V, VI, VII*, 3 vols., MGH AA ix, xi, xiii (Berlin, 1892-8), iii, p. 308.

¹¹⁹ Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, p. 32; Sharpe, *Adomnán of Iona*, pp. 255-6 n. 54.

¹²⁰ The Cennalath, king of Picts, whose obit is given in AU s.a. 580, was presumably his client.

¹²¹ Barrow, 'The Childhood of Scottish Christianity', 1-15.

Ríata and the Britons up to the 630s, which would have made it easier for Iona to recruit Britons. Áedán mac Gabráin's failed attempt to defeat Æthelfrith of Bernicia is geographically hard to understand unless one assumes an alliance with the British kingdom of Strathclyde, and probably also with the rump of its eastern neighbour, the kingdom of Gododdin, also British.¹²² He may have intended to put an end to English pressure on his British allies. On the other hand, the most likely date for the Northumbrian conquest of Lothian (the remaining territory of the Gododdin) is a generation later, in 638.¹²³ Dál Ríata had then recently become embroiled, on the losing side, in major conflict within Ireland, with highly deleterious results for its political fortunes;¹²⁴ its king, Domnall Brecc, suffered further defeat in 638;¹²⁵ four years later he was killed in the course of an attack on the Britons of Strathclyde.¹²⁶

To judge by the political context, then, the period from Columba's arrival in the kingdom of Dál Ríata in 563 up to the 630s would have been the most favourable for a mission to the Picts mounted by Iona with British help. Adomnán says that the first monk to die on Iona was a Briton.¹²⁷ The fourth abbot, Virgno (later form Fergna), was probably British.¹²⁸ His predecessors, Baíthéne and Laisrén, had been close kinsmen and trusted lieutenants of Columba, but they both had short periods as abbot (597–8, 598–605 respectively). Virgno was abbot for much longer (605–23); and, effectively, he was the first abbot to emerge from the shadow of Columba. Virgno, then, had the opportunity to consolidate Iona's leading role in the ecclesiastical life of northern Britain. As we shall see later, it was during his abbacy that the link was established with the Bernician dynasty that was to lead, after his death, to the Iona mission to Northumbria. The Christian Britons were the immediate southern neighbours of the Picts, but their role in the early history of Iona makes it all the easier to suppose considerable British

¹²² AU 600.2; Bede, *HE* i.24 (dated to 603).

¹²³ AU 638.1, 'The siege of Etin', namely of Edinburgh, is plausibly understood by K. H. Jackson, 'Edinburgh and the Anglian Occupation of Lothian', in P. Clemoes (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxons: Studies Presented to Bruce Dickins* (London, 1959), pp. 35–47, esp. 36–7, as marking the English conquest. ¹²⁴ See below, pp. 497–9. ¹²⁵ AU 638.1.

¹²⁶ AU 642.1; *Canu Aneirin*, ed. I. Williams (Cardiff, 1937), p. 39 (LXXIX), tr. K. H. Jackson, *The Gododdin: The Oldest Scottish Poem* (Edinburgh, 1969), pp. 98–9 (B1), and the discussion, pp. 47–8; tr. A. O. H. Jarman, *Aneirin: Y Gododdin. Britain's Oldest Poem* (Llandysul, 1988), p. 66.

¹²⁷ Adomnán, *VSC* iii.6.

¹²⁸ He was later known as Fergna Brit, Virgno the Briton: *Fél.*² Notes, 2 March; this is in accord with his omission from the originally eighth-century collection of pedigrees of Iona abbots belonging to Cenél Conaill, *CGSH* §§ 336–45; Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, pp. 39–40; his reputation on Iona remained good (Adomnán, *VSC* iii.19).

participation in a mission to the Picts led by Columba but probably still continuing during Virgno's time as abbot. It may tentatively be proposed, therefore, that the Britons of what is now southern Scotland did indeed play a role in the conversion of the Picts, but that this was as collaborators, not as competitors or predecessors, of Columba.

(V) IONA AND THE ENGLISH

Adomnán mentions two English monks on Iona in Columba's lifetime. Since Columba died in 597, this would be before the arrival of Augustine and his companions in Kent, the event usually taken to be the first step in the organised Christian mission to the English. In Adomnán's day an English presence on Iona would seem unproblematic: Iona even had an English bishop at the beginning of the eighth century.¹²⁹ It is entirely possible, therefore, that Adomnán's information, as he received it, had transposed into the sixth century the conditions of a later period. It is also possible, however, that a few Englishmen in what later became Northumbria were converted by their British neighbours, as were, probably, the Hwicce and the Magonsætan of the Severn valley.¹³⁰ Adomnán's information is not, therefore, so improbable that it must be rejected out of hand.

The effective conversion of the English, however, could not begin until missionaries found some means to win over kings and their households.¹³¹ In the seventh century, English kings appear to have regularly taken aristocratic teenage boys into their households; these boys were then known as 'king's thegns'.¹³² Such thegns were not yet prevented by the commitments of marriage and landholding from entering the households of other kings or from following potential kings into the exile that

¹²⁹ Coeddi, who died in 712 and bears an English name, is described in his obit in the annals (AU and AT) as bishop of Iona.

¹³⁰ Cf. P. Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England, 600–800* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 54–79.

¹³¹ For a general account of the conversion see H. M. R. E. Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1972), 94–102; for the role of the Irish, see J. Campbell, 'The Debt of the English Church to Ireland', in Ní Chatháin and Richter (eds.), *Irland und die Christenheit*, pp. 332–46; for the importance of kings and royal households, see Stancliffe, 'Kings and Conversion', 70–4.

¹³² A. Thacker, 'Some Terms for Noblemen in Anglo-Saxon England, c. 650–900', in D. Brown, J. Campbell and S. Chadwick Hawkes (eds.), *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 2, British Archaeological Reports, Brit. Ser., 92 (Oxford, 1981), pp. 201–36, is very helpful. I take Bede's *iuuentus* in *HE* iii.1 to be Latin for *geoguð*, and his *emeriti milites* in his Letter to Egberht, c. 11 (ed. Plummer, *Baedae Opera Historica*, p. 415), to be for *duguð*; the story of Imma in *HE* iv.22/20 is instructive on *miles*, *militia*, and *minister regis*.

frequently befell royal claimants.¹³³ In approximately his mid-twenties a thegn might hope to receive a grant of land from his own king, a grant that could reward notable achievement and also facilitate marriage.¹³⁴ The aristocracies of English kingdoms thus appear to have been shaped by this sequence of two crucial events: the entry as a teenager into a royal household and the departure in the twenties from the domestic but also military role of king's thegn to become a local nobleman, a *gesith*. An English aristocracy was thus divided into two main groups, the 'youth', *geoguð*, before departure from the royal household, and the tried companions of the king, his *duguð*, who, having served their time, now headed their own households. A kingdom was ruled by a network of households held together by a two-part aristocratic career of royal service followed by local authority.

The aristocratic life-cycle, determined by entry into and departure from the royal household, gave the king a powerful role in conversion. Not only might the decision to convert be taken by the king on the advice of his counsellors, his 'wise men', *witan*,¹³⁵ but, once the decision had been taken, his household could create a new Christian aristocracy. Two crucial moments confronted any aspirant noble who wished to maintain the high rank of his family: the moment when he wished to be admitted to the royal household and the moment when the king's judgement on his achievements as a thegn was given, in the form of a grant of land. Nobles needed access to the king, followed by royal generosity; the king, therefore, enjoyed powerful social levers to fashion a nobility according to his own wishes. The king's thegns would live for years within a Christian household, hoping for the generosity of a Christian king.¹³⁶ Whereas a pagan Anglo-Saxon king might have undermined the Christian faith of British noble subjects whose ancestors had been Christian for generations, the same influence of a king on the young aristocrats of his household would work in the opposite direction once the king had been converted.

The organised conversion of the English had, then, begun in the year

¹³³ For example, Æthelbald of Mercia, the first of his branch of the royal kindred to be king for the better part of a century, was an exile before his accession in 716: *Felix's Life of St Guthlac*, ed. and tr. B. Colgrave (Cambridge, 1956), c. 40.

¹³⁴ The best case is that of Benedict Biscop: Bede, *Historia Abbatum*, c. 1 (ed. Plummer, *Baedae Opera Historica*, i, 366–7). ¹³⁵ These were the *sapientes* and *consilarii* of Bede, *HE* ii.13.

¹³⁶ This effect was much weaker if the heir-apparent was still pagan, as in Kent, where Eadbald was not converted during his father's lifetime (Bede, *HE* ii.5); among the West Saxons in the 630s, Cynegils, the king, and one of his sons, Cwichelm, were converted, but Cenwealh, the son who succeeded Cynegils, remained a pagan (*ibid.*, iii.7).

of Columba's death, when the missionaries sent by Gregory the Great arrived in Kent.¹³⁷ At that date, the king of Kent, Æthelberht, was the most powerful ruler in southern England. He was married to a Frankish princess; and of all the English kingdoms, Kent was the most open to Frankish influence. The support of Frankish kings and bishops was a precondition for the success of the mission. Yet not all English kingdoms were as willing as Kent to welcome initiatives sponsored by the Franks. North of the Thames valley the material culture looked more to Scandinavia; moreover, these kingdoms had come to see themselves as Anglian rather than as Saxon or Jutish.¹³⁸ Such opposed cultural affiliations may help to explain the general pattern of conversion. By 660 all English kingdoms apart from Sussex and the Isle of Wight had Christian rulers. The two exceptions, it may be noted, were both on the south coast, both potentially open to Kentish influence. The missionaries based in Kent had indeed made progress in Essex and, to a limited extent, in East Anglia, but both these missions had collapsed, at the latest after Æthelberht's death in 616.¹³⁹ More promising progress was made through the marriage of a Kentish princess, Æthelberg, to Edwin, king of both Deira (roughly Yorkshire) and also Bernicia (at that date stretching approximately from the Tees to the Lammermuirs).¹⁴⁰ This led to Edwin's conversion, perhaps in 627, but he was killed in battle in the autumn of 633 and his kingdom was soon in the hands of his political enemies.¹⁴¹ The effective conversion of the English kingdoms from the borders of Lothian to the Thames was accomplished principally by a mission sent by Ségéne, abbot of Iona, and his senior monks, probably in 635.¹⁴² An important contribution was also made by a circle of advisers close to the Frankish kings Chlothar II and his son Dagobert I. A Frankish missionary drive was focused mainly in what is now north-eastern France and Belgium, but it was also influential across the sea in East Anglia.¹⁴³ The Irish role within this Frankish mission will be examined in the next chapter.

The beginning of the mission from Iona to the English was prepared by a political disaster. Æthelfrith, king of Bernicia and conqueror of Deira, as well as of several British districts, was killed in battle in 616,

¹³⁷ Ibid., i.25. See I. N. Wood, 'The Mission of Augustine of Canterbury to the English', *Speculum*, 69 (1994), 1–17, on Augustine.

¹³⁸ J. Hines, *The Scandinavian Character of Anglian England in the Pre-Viking Period*, Brit. Arch. Reports, 124 (Oxford, 1984), and *idem*, 'The Scandinavian Character of Anglian England: An Update', in M. Carver (ed.), *The Age of Sutton Hoo* (Woodbridge, 1992), 315–29.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., ii.9.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., ii.20.

¹⁴² Ibid., iii.3, 5.

¹⁴³ E. Ewig, *Die Merowinger und das Frankenreich* (Stuttgart, 1988), pp. 133–8, 149–52.

¹³⁹ Bede, *HE*, ii.3–5, 15.



Map 11. The Irish in Britain

defeated by his Deiran rival, Edwin, and the latter's protector, Rædwald, king of East Anglia.¹⁴⁴ This was the Edwin who would look to Kent for a wife and so be converted to Christianity. As the Bernician Æthelfrith had driven the Deiran Edwin into exile, so now Edwin drove Æthelfrith's sons out of Bernicia.¹⁴⁵ The eldest, Eanfrith, appears to have taken refuge among the Picts; most of the others preferred to go further and to settle for the time being in Dál Riata.¹⁴⁶ Eanfrith and his brothers, Oswald, Oswiu, and the rest, all became Christians during their exile. Moreover, they were accompanied by a group of king's thegns, many of whom may have followed their leaders in accepting baptism. The exiles spent some seventeen years in their various places of refuge. Oswald and Oswiu, at least, learnt Irish.

Edwin was killed in battle in October 633 by an alliance of the king of Gwynedd, Cadwallon, and a Mercian prince, who soon became king, Penda.¹⁴⁷ This enabled the exiles to return; Eanfrith became king of Bernicia, while Deira passed to a cousin of Edwin, Osric.¹⁴⁸ Both the new kings rejected the Christianity which they had accepted, Eanfrith probably in Pictland,¹⁴⁹ Osric as a close kinsman of Edwin; both were also soon killed by Cadwallon, first Osric of Deira and then, in the autumn of 634, Eanfrith of Bernicia. Soon after Eanfrith's death, however, Oswald, his brother, unexpectedly killed Cadwallon in a battle close to Hexham. This victory led to Oswald replacing Cadwallon, and, before him, Edwin, as the dominant king among the English and the Britons.

Oswald, unlike Eanfrith, did not abjure Christianity once back in his native land. Indeed, Bernician, as opposed to Deiran, tradition looked to Oswald's defeat of Cadwallon as a counterpart to the Emperor Constantine's victory at the Milvian Bridge – a battle fought under the emblem of the Cross which initiated a line of Christian rulers. Oswald's cross was, for the Bernicians, the beginning of the faith in their

¹⁴⁴ Bede, *HE* ii.12.

¹⁴⁵ Bede, *HE* iii.1; there is a longer list of the sons in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, MS E, s.a. 617.

¹⁴⁶ Its most powerful early ruler, Áedán mac Gabráin, had died in 606 (AU, AT); the current ruler was his son, Eochaid Buide (*ob.* 629, AU, AT). The power of Dál Riata declined after 637 (see extract from Cummeán the White in Adomnán, *VSC* iii.5), whereas Columba was on good terms with the king of Strathclyde, Rhydderch Hael. The battle of Degsastan *c.* 603 (Bede, *HE* i.30 but AU 600.2) appears to have been fought because Áedán came to the aid of the Britons threatened by Æthelfrith. Similarly, the current abbot of Iona was probably a Briton. By 642, however, the alliance between Dál Riata and the Britons of Strathclyde had come to an end (AU 642.1).

¹⁴⁷ Bede, *HE* ii.20. ¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, iii.1.

¹⁴⁹ C. Stancliffe, 'Oswald, "Most Holy and Most Victorious King of the Northumbrians"', in C. Stancliffe and E. Cambridge (eds.), *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint* (Stamford, 1995), pp. 38–9.

kingdom.¹⁵⁰ The story of the battle was also treasured on Iona, where it was claimed that Oswald had had a vision of Columba in a dream the night before the battle and that the saint had granted his protection to Oswald's army. This story, so Adomnán informs us, was told by Oswald in person to Ségéne, abbot of Iona, in the presence of Adomnán's predecessor, Failbe. And, after that battle, Adomnán adds, Oswald 'was elevated by God to be emperor of the whole of Britain'.¹⁵¹ With this power Oswald made sure that the kinsmen of Edwin, the ruling dynasty of Deira, had to go into exile, and he himself became king of Deira as well as of Bernicia.¹⁵²

The prospects for English Christianity were now rapidly improving. Paganism had probably never been as strong in Bernicia or in the western parts of Deira as it was in English kingdoms further south. Elmet, for example, a British kingdom in the West Riding of Yorkshire, had only recently been conquered by Edwin and is most unlikely to have lost its Christianity: the Life of Wilfrid depicts British priests fleeing before English victories not far to the west of Ripon.¹⁵³ Similarly, in Bernicia, Oswald may have conquered Lothian, subsequently the northernmost province of Northumbria; it too was already Christian.¹⁵⁴ In southern England, the king of the East Anglians was now a Christian, and before long a new mission would start among the West Saxons, Oswald's allies.¹⁵⁵ What was emerging was a pagan heartland in the midlands, dominated by Mercia, between the lower Trent, the Wash and the Thames valley, with outliers in Essex, Sussex and the Isle of Wight, while to the north, east and south there were Christian English kingdoms.

Oswald might, perhaps, have sought a bishop from the Britons. They, however, were defeated, yet still dangerous enemies, as Cadwallon had shown. The pagan Penda might ally with the Britons; Oswald, with recent experience of how close the Britons had come to toppling English power in Bernicia, did not. Instead, he turned to Iona, where Abbot

¹⁵⁰ Bede, *HE* iii.1–2. Bede knew it both as the battle of *Denises burna* (iii.1) and the battle of *Hefenfelth* (iii.2), perhaps because he was combining different sources; the Britons knew it as the battle of Hexham, *Cantscaul*: see K. H. Jackson, 'On the Northern British Section in Nennius', in N. K. Chadwick (ed.), *Celt and Saxon: Studies in the Early British Border* (Cambridge, 1963), p. 34. Bede's association of *Hefenfelth* with Oswald's cross, and of the beginnings of Bernician Christianity with a great victory over the Christian Britons, appears to stem from a cult based at Hexham and deliberately encouraged by Wilfrid: cf. J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People: A Historical Commentary*, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford, 1988), p. 89.

¹⁵² Bede, *HE* ii.20.

¹⁵³ *Historia Brittonum*, c. 63, ed. E. Faral in *La Légende arthurienne: études et documents*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1929), iii.4–62; ed. and tr. J. Morris in *Nennius, British History, and the Welsh Annals* (London, 1980); cf. Bede, *HE* iv.23/21; Stephen, *Vita S. Wilfridi*, c. 17.

¹⁵⁴ AU 638.1.

¹⁵⁵ Bede, *HE* ii.15; iii.7, 18.

Ségéne may well have become a friend before Oswald's return to Bernicia. Aidan (Áedán) was sent by Ségéne to be bishop to the English ruled by Oswald. He established his see on an island, Lindisfarne, joined to the mainland at low tide.¹⁵⁶ This was a few miles to the north of the royal fortress at Bamburgh. The monks of Iona, however, knew Lindisfarne by its British name, Medcoit, suggesting that, even if Oswald regarded Irish monks as much more acceptable than any British cleric, Aidan had British contacts and probably British clergy subject to him.¹⁵⁷ The tradition at Iona, just as at Hexham, came to perceive Bernicia as a thoroughly pagan kingdom before Oswald's victory, but that is not likely to have been the reality in the 630s.¹⁵⁸

At first sight Aidan's mission appears to be closely identified with Oswald and with the fortunes of the Bernician dynasty. When he arrived in Bernicia, he had not learnt English and Bede offers a picture of the king interpreting the bishop's words to his noblemen.¹⁵⁹ For Bede, this was an exemplary collaboration between king and bishop in the cause of the true faith. Even when Aidan had learnt English, however, royal authority underpinned his mission, and not only because of the role of the king's household. Some of the king's closest adherents had presumably been converted with him in exile;¹⁶⁰ and they would have made the establishment of a solidly Christian royal household easier. This, however, was only a start. The king also had a network of royal vills, clusters of hall, sleeping quarters and other buildings; these were scattered across the kingdom and linked with small districts which supplied food-renders and drink to feast the royal household and their guests when the king came on circuit. Bede says that Aidan used chapels in these royal vills as local bases for preaching tours.¹⁶¹ Before, therefore, the new Christian Church in Bernicia and Deira acquired local churches to complement the central base at Lindisfarne, it used royal vills instead, identifying the new religion all the more closely with the authority of the king.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., iii.3.

¹⁵⁷ AU 632.4 (placed in the year after the entry giving Edwin's obit, 631). AU's English entries are regularly a year or two early compared with Bede until 651, when the corrected AU date agrees with Bede, *HE* ii.14, on the deaths of Oswine and Aidan. Cf. *Martyrology of Tallaght*, ed. Best and Lawlor, 31 August, *Fél. Notes*, 31 August; *Historia Brittonum*, cc. 62, 65.

¹⁵⁸ Adomnán, *VSC* i.1: 'Nam usque in id temporis tota illa Saxonia gentilitatis et ignorantiae tenebris obscurata erat', 'For up to that time the whole of that land of the English was obscured by the dark shadows of paganism and ignorance.' It is doubtful whether Adomnán knew of the Augustinian mission. ¹⁵⁹ Bede, *HE* iii.3.

¹⁶⁰ The *iuuentus* in Bede, *HE* iii.1, who went into exile with Oswald and his brothers.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., iii.17.

When Aidan first came to Bernicia, presumably as a monoglot Irishman, his ministrations may have been largely confined to the royal household, which will have contained other Irish speakers apart from the king.¹⁶² At this period, therefore, Aidan is likely to have accompanied the king on circuit around his vills. To judge by Bede, however, Aidan deliberately shed this role as virtual royal chaplain once he had acquired enough English and enough knowledge of the country to act independently.¹⁶³ He still used royal vills but did not travel as part of the royal household. Moreover, as befitted his monastic profession, he preserved a pattern of life evidently remote from the round of feasting, gift-giving and drinking expected of a king and his nobles.¹⁶⁴ His visitations to a royal vill might thus avoid seeming to be yet another imposition among the economic obligations required to sustain those who lived royally.

The advantage of this reliance on royal vills, yet careful distinction between monastic mission and royal festivity, may perhaps have been seen after Oswald's death in battle in 642. Oswald was, no doubt, a good Christian but he was also a warrior-king in the heroic mode, as illustrated by his death fighting Mercians and Britons on the borders of Wales.¹⁶⁵ Moreover, he ruled not just his native Bernicians but also the Deirans and men of Lindsey; both seem to have resented his rule as foreign and oppressive.¹⁶⁶ Yet Aidan ended his life as the particular friend of the last native Deiran king, Oswine, son of the Osric who briefly ruled Deira in 633–4.¹⁶⁷ He was thus so far able to transcend the initial political basis of his mission that he could become the trusted friend as well as bishop of that king's political enemy, who was to be the victim in feud of Oswald's brother, Oswiu. Because Aidan managed to cross the divide between the two feuding dynasties, he gave to Northumbria – probably not yet known by that name – an accepted shape as an ecclesiastical diocese before it was ever acknowledged to be, in justice rather than by military oppression, a single kingdom.

¹⁶² Namely some of those who shared his exile.

¹⁶³ Bede, *HE* iii.5; and cf. the story of the horse in iii.14.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Bede, *HE* iii.26, and J. Campbell, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (London, 1986), pp. 17–18,

41.
¹⁶⁵ C. Stancliffe, 'Where Was Oswald Killed?' in Stancliffe and Cambridge (eds.), *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint*, pp. 84–96.

¹⁶⁶ Bede, *HE* iii.11 on the reaction of the monks of Bardney to the arrival of Oswald's bones; a corresponding reaction to Bernician rule over Deira is evident in the description of Æthelfrith of Bernicia as 'the tyrant Æthelfrith' in the Whitby Life of Gregory the Great, c. 16 (ed. B. Colgrave, *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great by an Anonymous Monk of Whitby* [Kansas, 1968; repr. Cambridge, 1985], pp. 98–100).
¹⁶⁷ Bede, *HE* iii.14.

The deaths of Oswine of Deira and of Aidan in 651, separated by only a month, were linked together both by Bede and by the Irish annals.¹⁶⁸ Aidan was succeeded by Finán, sent, like his predecessor, from Iona. The early years of his episcopate were to see further missionary successes against a background provided by rapid reversals of military fortune in the long struggle between Mercia and Bernicia, culminating in Oswiu's victory against Penda in 655 at the Winwaed. In 653, only two years after Aidan's death, Christianity first found an enduring foothold within the kingdom of the Mercians. Penda had made his son Peada sub-king of the Middle Angles, a collection of small peoples in the east and south midlands who nevertheless had enough unity for Bede to think that they deserved a bishopric to themselves apart from the Mercians.¹⁶⁹ Peada wished to marry Alhfred, Oswiu's daughter, a marriage proposal that complemented the earlier union between her brother Alhfrith and Penda's daughter. As one element in the marriage settlement Peada accepted baptism; priests, both Irish and English, were sent by Finán to preach the faith to his people. When the Middle Anglian mission had only just begun, Oswiu succeeded in persuading the king of the East Saxons, Sigebert, to convert, and Cedd, an English priest and pupil of Aidan, was diverted from the Middle Angles to Essex.¹⁷⁰ In 654 he was able to report to Finán and Oswiu on the success of his mission and was ordained bishop.

In 652, just before this new expansion of the Irish mission, Ségéne, the abbot who sent Aidan and Finán, died. He had probably visited Bernicia during the reign of Oswald, just as abbots of Iona visited their Irish dependencies.¹⁷¹ Ségéne's successor, Suibne moccu Fír Thrí, only lived until 657. If, however, his successor, Cumméne the Fair (657–669), visited the English mission early in his abbacy, he could have travelled from Stirling to Lindisfarne, and then south via York, coming at last to Cedd's new churches, Bradwell-on-Sea in an old Roman Saxon Shore fort looking out across the North Sea to Frisia, and Tilbury looking across the Thames to Kent. That great journey would have included some districts

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.; AU 651. ¹⁶⁹ Bede, *HE* iii.21; Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, p. 118.

¹⁷⁰ Bede, *HE* iii.22; in iii.23, Bede says that Cedd had been educated at Lindisfarne; since he was consecrated bishop in 654, his Lindisfarne education must have been during Aidan's episcopate.

¹⁷¹ This is suggested by Adomnán, *VSC*, i.1, where he says that he heard a story from his predecessor as abbot, Fáilbe, and that Fáilbe had heard it from King Oswald, when the latter told it to Ségéne; judging, therefore, by the visits of abbots of Iona to Ireland, Ségéne is likely to have met Oswald, once the latter was king, on a visit to Northumbria. This is much more likely than that Oswald returned to Iona after he had become king.

largely populated by Britons; otherwise he would never have left lands converted to Christianity by his monks and the pupils of his monks. It was less than a century since the death in 579 of Findbarr of Movilla, probably the last of the principal early *peregrini* in Ireland, and also probably Columba's teacher.

The scale of this achievement owed much to two Bernician kings, Oswald and Oswiu, great war-leaders both of them. Yet what is striking is, first, as we have seen, that Aidan could form as close a relationship with the Deiran Oswine as with the Irish-speaking Bernician Oswald, and, secondly, that Christianity showed its strength as much by surviving the many military reverses inflicted by the redoubtable Mercian king Penda as by taking advantage of successes. The triumph of the Christianity preached by Aidan and Finán cannot be explained in terms of military and political good fortune, though the particular timing of its advances often can be so explained.

The same distinction between an explanation of a general trend and an explanation of particular events or actions applies to the ending of Iona's control of much of the English Church in 664.¹⁷² The change was accomplished by royal power; it may even be true that one essential component in bringing about the change at that particular time and in that particular fashion was political manoeuvring within the royal family.¹⁷³ Yet the so-called Synod of Whitby of 664 – in fact a meeting of the royal council summoned, and presided over, by Oswiu – was only one step in a long process, lasting for a century and a half, by which the Celtic Easter and tonsure gave way to those sanctioned by Rome.

The earlier stages in this process will be examined in the next chapter, while the intellectual issues will be explained in the chapter after that. By 664 Leinster and Munster had abandoned the Celtic Easter for a generation.¹⁷⁴ The northern half of Ireland and the Irish settlements in western Scotland, together with the Picts, had continued to adhere to their traditional Easter, as had the Britons. During Finán's period as bishop (651–61), an Irishman, Rónán, had argued the case for the Roman Easter within Northumbria.¹⁷⁵ A variety of views was only to be expected since the English mission-field had never been restricted to monks of the Columban community. Fursa, for example, had

¹⁷² Bede, *HE* iii.25; Stephen, *Vita S. Wilfridi*, c. 10.

¹⁷³ Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 107–8; his theory has met with some scepticism, but, in my opinion, unjustifiably.

¹⁷⁴ Bede, *HE* ii.19; iii.3.

¹⁷⁵ Bede, *HE* iii.25.

been active within East Anglia for about ten years from the late 630s to c. 648, before he left for Francia.¹⁷⁶ He may have come from Louth and therefore the northern half of Ireland, faithful to the Celtic Easter;¹⁷⁷ yet he seems to have found no difficulty in collaborating with the incumbent bishop, Felix, who had come from Burgundy via Canterbury a few years earlier.¹⁷⁸ Bede remarked that both Felix of East Anglia and Honorius, archbishop of Canterbury had a high regard for Aidan, notwithstanding disagreements over Easter.¹⁷⁹ By the 650s, however, with increasingly numerous contacts between England and the continent as well as, probably, between England and southern Ireland, there was a growing urgency to the debate.¹⁸⁰ According to Bede, Oswiu's queen, Eanfled, observed the Roman Easter, thus introducing discord into the royal household itself.¹⁸¹

These difficulties and debates might not have come to a head so soon had it not been for an alliance between two men, Alhfrith, son of Oswiu and also sub-king of all or part of Deira, and Wilfrid, a Northumbrian nobleman who, after some years at Lindisfarne without receiving the tonsure, had travelled first to Lyons, where he became a cleric and a

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., iii.19. He arrived when Sigberht was still king of the East Angles; Anna, who became king after Sigberht's death (preceded by some years of retirement in favour of his kinsman Ecgric), was ruling when he received Cenwalh, king of Wessex, when the latter was expelled from his kingdom c. 642 (Bede, *HE* iii.7 and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* s.a.a. 645–8). Fursa's obit is given under both AU 648 and 649. For the early Life used by Bede, see P. Ó Riain, 'Les Vies de Saint Fursy: les sources irlandaises', *Revue du Nord*, 68 (1986), 405–14; for the role of Fursa and his disciples in Francia, P. Fouracre and R. A. Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France: History and Hagiography, 640–720* (Manchester, 1996), pp. 313–16.

¹⁷⁷ The Louth connection of Fursa is suggested by *Fél.*², Notes, 16 Jan., where one manuscript says that he was from the Conailli Muirthemne, a statement borne out by his pedigree, *CGSH* 157.1, compared with *CGH* i.327 (162 c 20, addition in *LL*); this then may be taken in combination with (1) AU 825.4: 'Colmán, abbot of Sláne and of other monasteries in Francia and in Ireland, died'; (2) AU 758.1: 'Muiredach mac Cormaic Sláne, abbot of Louth'; (3) AU 779.2: 'Moinán mac Cormaic, abbot of Cathair Fursi in Francia' (i.e. Péronne); and (4) AU 789.3: 'Fedach mac Cormaic, abbot of Louth and Sláne and Dom Liacc . . . died'; cf. Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, p. 163, where genealogies of the two ecclesiastical families which held Sláne are given; the other one, descended from Colmán of the Britons, seems to have connections with S. Brega. If Fursa was from the Conailli Muirthemne, Sláne (in northern Brega) should have established its influence in Péronne via Louth. In addition, it is thought that Patrician texts reached the continent via Louth and Péronne (Louth was the home of Torbach son of Gormáin, for whom the Book of Armagh was written: see AT = AU 758): Doherty, 'The Cult of St Patrick and the Politics of Armagh', 53, 56–7. The *Vita S. Fursei*, c. 1 (ed. B. Krusch, *MGH SRM* 4, p. 433; Heist, *Vitae*, p. 37), followed by Bede, says that he was of very noble birth, which would be true if he was from a collateral line of the royal kindred of the Conailli Muirthemni. ¹⁷⁸ Bede, *HE* ii.15; iii.19–20. ¹⁷⁹ Ibid., iii.25.

¹⁸⁰ For contact with southern Ireland by 664, cf. Bede, *HE* iii.27; on Ecgerht and Æthelhun at Rathmelsigi, Ráith Máelsigi, now identified as Clonmelsh, Co. Carlow, T. Fanning, 'Some Field Monuments in the Townlands of Clonmelsh and Garryhundon, Co. Carlow', *Peritia*, 3 (1984), 43–9.

¹⁸¹ Bede, *HE* iii.25; she was Edwin's daughter and had been brought from Kent to marry Oswiu, *ibid.*, iii.15.

favourite of the bishop, Aunemund, and then to Rome, where he had received instruction in the Dionysiac paschal computus from a deacon named Boniface.¹⁸² Once back in England he became the protégé of Agilbert, the Frankish bishop of the West Saxons, as well as a friend of Cenwalh, their king, and was ordained priest.¹⁸³ Wilfrid entered directly into the dispute in Northumbria when Alhfrith gave him the monastery of Ripon.¹⁸⁴ Ripon had been a daughter-house of Lindisfarne or Melrose; its community was headed by one of Aidan's chosen English pupils, Eata, and included among its number Cuthbert, roughly a contemporary of Wilfrid and later bishop of Lindisfarne. Eata and his monks were apparently ejected because of their paschal observance and their incorrect tonsure.¹⁸⁵ This action thus challenged the validity of the Christianity in which Oswiu had been educated in the days of his exile and which all Northumbria had since accepted. Moreover, since the strictly ecclesiastical challenge of Wilfrid received the political backing of Alhfrith, Oswiu was reacting reasonably in attempting to resolve the issue by a royal council attended by Alhfrith but presided over by Oswiu himself.¹⁸⁶ The main protagonists in the discussion were churchmen, Colmán, the bishop sent from Iona in 661 to replace Finán, and Wilfrid, with Agilbert in the background; but while they presented the arguments Oswiu made the decision, in favour of Wilfrid.

Colmán could not accept the decision since he was bound by obedience and loyalty to Iona.¹⁸⁷ In Ireland, moreover, such issues were decided by true synods, not sessions of the king's council; Colmán may, therefore, have had objections to the way in which the issue had been resolved.¹⁸⁸ What Oswiu gained was greater royal control over the Northumbrian Church: he, not the abbot of Iona, would now decide who was to be bishop.¹⁸⁹ He also staved off the political challenge posed

¹⁸² Stephen, *Vita S. Wilfridi*, cc. 2–5 (Dalfinus is an error for Aunemundus, Dalfinus being the family name: Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, p. 192).

¹⁸³ Stephen, *Vita S. Wilfridi*, cc. 7 and 9, does not explicitly relate these two crucial alliances, with the king and with the bishop of the West Saxons, but it is nevertheless likely that they occurred at the same time: Wilfrid's Frankish contacts would have given him access to Agilbert (a Frank), who then recommended him to Cenwalh, who then in his turn recommended him to Alhfrith.

¹⁸⁴ Bede, *HE* iii.25; Bede, *Prose Life of St Cuthbert*, cc. 7–8 (ed. and tr. Colgrave, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, pp. 174–81); Stephen, *Vita S. Wilfridi*, c. 8.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, c. 8; Bede, *HE* v.19. The Lindisfarne Life of St Cuthbert claimed (ii. 2, ed. and tr. Colgrave, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, pp. 76–7) that the saint had a Roman tonsure from the start, but this is virtually certain to be untrue. ¹⁸⁶ Stephen, *Vita S. Wilfridi*, c. 9; Bede, *HE* iii.25.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, iii.26. ¹⁸⁸ As suggested by Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, p. 34.

¹⁸⁹ See the beginning of Stephen, *Vita S. Wilfridi*, c. 11; Bede, *HE* iii.26, implies that Oswiu also determined who was to be the abbot of Lindisfarne: Colmán had to ask that it should be Eata, one of 'the twelve *pueri* of Aidan'.

by his son, Alhfrith, who is said by Bede to have rebelled against his father and who is never mentioned after 664.¹⁹⁰ Wilfrid, who had gone to Francia to be consecrated bishop, remained there for about a year before he was allowed to return to Ripon.¹⁹¹ The new bishop of York was Chad, another of Aidan's disciples, and, like his brother Cedd, bishop of the East Saxons, closer in sympathy to the Iona mission than to Wilfrid.¹⁹² Indeed, Wilfrid's supporters accused Chad's supporters of being unreconciled 'Quartodecimans' (heretics on the question of Easter).¹⁹³

The upshot of these events within the Northumbrian Church was deep-seated division which took about fifty years to heal. Broadly, there were now three parties. Some Englishmen refused to accept the decision at Whitby and left with Bishop Colmán.¹⁹⁴ They became the English community at Mayo in Connaught, founded between 669 and 676, which remained English in membership until the Viking period; in the second half of the eighth century it was even attached to the province of York.¹⁹⁵ On the other hand, Mayo also retained its connection with Iona, as has been demonstrated from sculptural evidence.¹⁹⁶ Secondly, within Northumbria there were significant figures who accepted Oswiu's decision but saw no reason to reject the tradition of Aidan, Finán and Colmán. They included Eata, now abbot of Lindisfarne but consecrated bishop of Lindisfarne and Hexham by Archbishop Theodore in 678;¹⁹⁷ Chad, bishop of York from 665 to 669 and subsequently of Lichfield;¹⁹⁸ Hild, great-niece of King Edwin and abbess of Whitby,¹⁹⁹ the designated

¹⁹⁰ Bede, *HE* iii.14. His last action was to send Wilfrid to be consecrated bishop of York in succession to Tuda who died of the plague in 664: *ibid.*, iii.28, and Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, p. 237. ¹⁹¹ Bede, *HE* iii.28; cf. Stephen, *Vita S. Wilfridi*, c. 14.

¹⁹² Cedd belonged to 'the Irish party' at Whitby: Bede, *HE* iii. 25. Chad had spent some time in Ireland: *ibid.*, iv.3. ¹⁹³ Stephen, *Vita S. Wilfridi*, c. 14. ¹⁹⁴ Bede, *HE* iv.4.

¹⁹⁵ After AU 668.3 (the foundation of Inishboffin) and before 676.1 (the obit of Colmán); Alcuin, *Epistolae* 2 and 287, ed. E. Dümmmler, MGH, *Epistolae Karolini Aevi*, ii (1895), pp. 19, 445–6, tr. S. Allott, *Alcuin of York* (York, 1974), nos. 32 and 33; Northern annals in *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia*, ed. T. Arnold, 2 vols., Rolls Series (London, 1882, 1885), ii.44–5, 51, s.aa. 773 (the consecration of the recipient of Alcuin, *Ep.* 2, ed. Dümmmler, p. 19, tr. Allott, no. 32), 786, tr. D. Whitelock, *English Historical Documents*, c. 500–1042, 2nd edn (London, 1979), p. 268, 270. Ealdwulf, bishop of the church of Mayo, subscribed the decrees of the legatine synod of the province of York in 786: *ibid.*, no. 191.

¹⁹⁶ D. Kelly, 'Some Remains of High Crosses in the West of Ireland', *JRSAL*, 123 (1993), 152–4 and 162 (the final at the apex of the shaft of the cross is without parallel in Ireland but is comparable to that on St John's Cross on Iona).

¹⁹⁷ Bede, *HE* iii.26; iv.12. Wilfrid may have been offered an arrangement by which he remained bishop of Hexham; when he refused and was sent into exile, Eata, who was probably originally intended to be bishop only of Lindisfarne, took over Hexham as well: Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, p. 150. ¹⁹⁸ Bede, *HE* iii.28; iv.2–3.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, iv.23/21.

burial-place of Oswiu and his family.²⁰⁰ Finally, there was the party of Wilfrid, those who rejected the Irish tradition root and branch.²⁰¹ In the years after Whitby, therefore, there was never a division between English and Irish as such, but rather divisions within the Irish and Northumbrian Churches.

Not surprisingly, the arguments provoked by these disagreements in Northumbria had some effect in Ireland. This can best be seen in the artistic sphere, but the sympathies and divisions revealed by Gospel-Books and sculpture are best seen as a symptom of broader issues of religious and cultural alignment. The thirty years of what Bede called 'the episcopacy of the Irish' in Northumbria,²⁰² together with the mission to the Picts mounted by Columba some sixty years before Aidan travelled to Bernicia, had created a cultural province; this is justly named Insular since it dominated the larger part of two islands, Ireland and Britain.²⁰³ The Insular cultural tradition was first and foremost an expression of religious values. These values were not originally the emblems of any party within the Church but rather the consequences of conversion of Irishmen by Britons and of Picts and Englishmen by the Irish. Similarities in linguistic situation added a further strand to these initial bonds: many Britons spoke Latin in Patrick's day, but they were monoglot British-speakers by the time of Adomnán.²⁰⁴ The Irish were never native speakers of Latin, nor were the English. Until the eighth century the centre of gravity in Francia lay in Romance-speaking areas: when Agilbert became bishop of Paris c. 665, he would have needed in his pastoral work to use a Latin well on its way to becoming French. By that date there was no such situation anywhere in the British Isles. The Insular cultural region was created by monks whose main religious language was Latin, but they had all had to learn the language from grammars and word-lists. Access to the language of the Church, of the Bible, the mass-book or any standard work of theology was through Latin. Latin grammar was thus the key to Insular culture. Modern scholars

²⁰⁰ Ibid., iii.24.

²⁰¹ Stephen, *Vita S. Wilfridi*, cc. 5, 47.

²⁰² Bede, *HE* iii.26.

²⁰³ Unfortunately, there are no surviving early books known to be from southern Ireland (the most 'Roman' part of the island); on the other hand, the combined evidence of the Ossory high crosses and of Gerald of Wales's description of an illuminated Gospel-Book at Kildare, suggest that the south did not differ from the north in its approach to book illumination: N. Edwards, 'An Early Group of Crosses from the Kingdom of Ossory', *JRSAL*, 113 (1983), 5–46 (note the account of spiral and interlace ornament, pp. 9–18, and the comparison on p. 30 between figural scenes in the Ossory stones and Pictish sculpture); Harbison, *The High Crosses of Ireland*, nos. 6–7, 142, 168–9, 199; on pp. 380–1 he dates the western Ossory group to the ninth century. Gerald, *Topographia Hiberniae*, ed. O'Meara, c. 71; tr. J.J. O'Meara, *Gerald of Wales: The History and Topography of Ireland*, Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth, 1982), p. 84.

²⁰⁴ Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain*, pp. 119–20.

have debated whether particular grammars surviving from this period were written by Irishmen or Englishmen.²⁰⁵ Such debates do not affect the main points: Britons taught the Irish Latin; the Irish then taught the Picts and many of the English, especially of the north and the midlands. The whole process was encapsulated in the careers of Columba, probably taught by a Briton, himself teacher of the Picts, and Aidan, monk of Iona and bishop of the Bernicians and the Deirans.

A corollary of the common Insular situation – without native Latin speakers, yet needing Latin to practise their religion and to deepen their theology – was the first appearance of a written vernacular literature in Europe. The earliest beginnings may have been among the northern Britons, of what is now southern Scotland and northern England.²⁰⁶ They were immediate neighbours of both the Irish of Dál Riata and the English of Northumbria; many became the subjects of the latter. Vernacular literature flourished most extensively in Ireland, a richer country than almost any surviving lands of the Britons and almost entirely free from external invasion. In the eighth century there was also a significant literary output in the Northumbrian vernacular. The Ruthwell Cross, for example, situated in a district that had been British up to the middle of the seventh century, three generations before the cross was erected in the middle of the eighth, contains lines from a poem which surfaces, perhaps expanded, in a tenth-century manuscript.²⁰⁷ On the cross, the vernacular lines of verse were carved in runes, letter-forms brought by the English from their continental homelands.²⁰⁸ On the same cross, Latin text, used to explain the images on the two main faces of the cross, was carved in square Roman capitals. The combination of the two scripts and the two languages echoed those bilingual stones, discussed in chapter 3, erected by the Irish in western Britain. Imitation is unlikely; instead the parallel reveals a similar cultural situation, with a vernacular being given sufficient honour to be admitted, alongside Latin, to the grandest medium, stone, the distinction between the two languages being reinforced by the further distinction between two scripts. A new English elite deployed within its Christian message the scripts and languages of both the Roman and the Germanic past.

²⁰⁵ V. Law, *Insular Latin Grammarians*, Studies in Celtic History iii (Woodbridge, 1982), chaps. 4–6; L. Holtz, 'Les Grammairiens hiberno-latins étaient-ils des Anglo-Saxons?', *Peritia*, 2 (1983), 170–84.

²⁰⁶ A. O. H. Jarman, *The Cynfeirdd: Early Welsh Poets and Poetry* (Cardiff, 1981), pp. 1–65, provides a clear introduction to the *Gododdin* and to the poetry of Taliesin.

²⁰⁷ *The Dream of the Rood*, ed M. Swanton (Manchester, 1970), contains the Ruthwell text facing the corresponding lines in the Vercelli manuscript.

²⁰⁸ R. W. V. Elliott, *Runes: An Introduction* (Manchester, 1959), pp. 33–9.

In the sixth century the Britons, together with the Irish settled among them, kept the square capitals for inscriptional lettering, while their grander books were written in a distinctive form of half-uncial. This was a book-script, perhaps developed in Roman Africa.²⁰⁹ By the sixth century it appears to have been the only book-hand at the upper end of the 'hierarchy of scripts' employed in Britain, although an informal cursive was used for less important purposes.²¹⁰ These two types, formal half-uncial and informal cursive, had strongly influenced each other by the seventh century, suggesting a long period of coexistence within a single such hierarchy of scripts. In other words, there was a range of script-styles extending from the grandest or most formal to the least, a range similar in principle to that distinguishing formal from informal styles of written or spoken language. By the seventh century these forms of Insular script were shared by Britons (including those of Brittany), the Irish, the Picts and the English converted by the Irish.²¹¹

About 600 the Britons abandoned square capitals as an inscriptional form of lettering in favour of the book-script, half-uncial.²¹² The one script was now used both for books and for inscriptions. The Britons thus moved a step further away from their Roman past, just as, at much the same time, spoken British Latin was declining rapidly towards extinction. Those ties which had attached the Britons to the Empire, and had thus distinguished them from the Irish or the Picts, were diminishing at the very time when the missionaries of papal Rome arrived in Britain. As a result, the Insular cultural province was becoming more uniform, but there was the possibility of a conflict between two different traditions.

The missionaries sent by Gregory the Great, who arrived in Kent in 597, were native Latin speakers and were used to different scribal traditions. For them the grand formal script was uncial rather than

²⁰⁹ B. Bischoff, 'Die alten Namen der lateinischen Schriftarten', in his *Mittelalterliche Studien: Ausgewählte Aufsätze zur Schriftkunde und zur Literaturgeschichte*, 3 vols. (Stuttgart, 1966–81), i.1–5.

²¹⁰ Brown, 'The Oldest Irish Manuscripts and their Late Antique Background', pp. 311–27, esp. 316–21 (repr. in *A Palaeographer's View*, pp. 221–41), esp. 227–41, argues that the principal starting-point was what Lowe called 'quarter uncial' and he himself terms 'literary cursive'; the problem, however, is to distinguish between (1) elements derived from a late-antique model and (2) elements which derive from cross-influences within a hierarchy of scripts once established. The whole issue needs to be reconsidered with proper regard being given to the British epigraphic evidence.

²¹¹ No early books are known to survive from Pictland, but inscriptions demonstrate that they belonged to the area of Insular script: e.g. the 'Drosten Stone', St Vigean, no. 1, in Allen and Anderson, *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*, iii, p. 236, and fig. 251 on p. 237.

²¹² *ECMW* (Cardiff, 1950), no. 13, the Catamanus stone, which may be dated to c. 625 and is in half-uncial but with uncial *a*.

half-uncial.²¹³ Within Britain, therefore, there was the possibility that the distinction between uncial and half-uncial – respectively the grandest within the contemporary Roman and the Insular hierarchies of script – might come to express a political opposition. The grandest script usually carries the strongest ideological implications. This potential opposition never happened, as far as we know, among the Irish themselves: some might style themselves ‘Romans’ as opposed to ‘Hibernians’, but they did not give such differences an artistic or scribal expression. That this opposition arose in England was very probably due to the perceptively combative approach adopted by Wilfrid in Northumbria. It was Wilfrid who first adopted the uncial script in Northumbria, just as he was at pains to develop a church architecture that would be distinctively Roman; his biographer, Stephen, insists, for both Ripon and Hexham, his principal Northumbrian churches, on the ashlar stone, the pillars, the side-chapels – all very different from Lindisfarne, where the church built by Finán in oak continued into the eighth century, though it was encased in lead between 688 and 698.²¹⁴ By visiting Hexham and entering the crypt that survives from Wilfrid’s building, one can see how he executed his project and what fed his imagination: the structure is bespattered with Roman inscriptions; Corbridge and the Roman Wall lay nearby. Wilfrid had indeed lived in Lyons, a great Roman city, and had visited Rome itself, but his building also looked to the Roman past of Britain. Earlier Englishmen may sometimes have deliberately avoided Roman sites, regarding them as foreign to their way of life,²¹⁵ although this was certainly not a consistent attitude.²¹⁶ Now through a distinctively Roman Christianity a bridge could be built to a Roman past. Similarly from the monastery at Jarrow, begun in 682, and ruled by Wilfrid’s pupil Ceolfrith, there survives a foundational inscription of 685, in square capitals, dating the completion of the church to the fifteenth year of the reign of Ecgfrith, Oswiu’s son and successor.²¹⁷ Less than a century after the Britons had abandoned square capitals as their inscriptional letter-form, the English ‘Romans’ rediscovered them from the ruins of Roman power scattered in profusion across Bernicia.

²¹³ E. A. Lowe, *English Uncial* (Oxford, 1960), pp. 6–7 (the crucial ex. is *CLA* ii.126, St Augustine’s Gospels). ²¹⁴ Stephen, *Vita S. Wilfridi*, cc. 17 and 22; Bede, *HE* iii.25.

²¹⁵ As suggested by Bede’s reference to the deserted Grantacæstir, *HE* iv.19.

²¹⁶ Carlisle, recently captured from the Britons, was clearly an important Northumbrian royal centre in 685: Anonymous Life of St Cuthbert, iv.8, Bede’s Prose Life, c. 27, ed. and tr. Colgrave, *Two Lives of St Cuthbert*, pp. 122–3, 242–5.

²¹⁷ J. Higgitt, ‘The Dedication Inscription at Jarrow and its Context’, *Antiquaries Journal*, 59 (1979), 343–74. The date at which work on building Jarrow began is given by the Anonymous Life of Ceolfrith, cc. 11–12, ed. Plummer, *Venerabilis Baedae Opera Historica*, i.391–2.

Wilfrid's perception of how he could attack the tradition of Aidan and Columba in both script and building accords with everything we know about his policies once Theodore established him as bishop of York in 669. From his actions and the defence of them by his biographer Stephen we can see through contemporary, though admittedly hostile, eyes what the tradition of Columba and Aidan signified. Wilfrid had only nine years at most at York before he was expelled from Northumbria by Ecgrith in 678.²¹⁸ Yet within that period he had not only established Roman uncial as the preferred book-script of the Northumbrian *Romani* and stone architecture *more Romano* as the preferred form of ecclesiastical building, he had also introduced the Rule of St Benedict as the leading text by which the monastic life might be formed. His Life has him declare in his defence before a synod presided over by Aldfrith, king of Northumbria and Berhtwald, archbishop of Canterbury:

Was I not the first, after the death of the first elders who were sent by St Gregory, to sift out the poisonous weeds planted by the Irish? . . . And did I not arrange the life of the monks in accordance with the rule of the holy father Benedict which none had previously introduced into Northumbria?²¹⁹

The Benedictine Rule was widely used, together with that of Columbanus, in seventh-century Frankish monastic foundations and was thus known to some Irish monks at least.²²⁰ But for Wilfrid, the Rule was evidently of a piece with the other instruments by which he broke with Irish tradition in Northumbria. It probably became a principal guide to the monastic life at Lindisfarne before 705, perhaps as a result of Wilfrid's year in charge (687–8).²²¹

The adoption of the Rule of St Benedict as another of the weapons with which to attack 'the poisonous weeds planted by the Irish' may explain why Adomnán chose Gregory the Great's portrait of Benedict as one of the principal literary models for his own portrait of Columba. The tone of the Life suggests that Adomnán did not make this choice in order to reject the claims of the Rule of St Benedict. He would have come across monasteries using the Benedictine Rule, together with others, when he visited Northumbria.²²² Rather his purpose was to defend the reputation of St Columba and thus reassure his own monks

²¹⁸ Bede, *HE* iv.12.

²¹⁹ Stephen, *Vita S. Wilfridi*, c. 47.

²²⁰ See below, pp. 383–8.

²²¹ This may be inferred from the importance of the *decani*, as shown by the Anonymous Life of St Cuthbert, iv.4 (ed. and tr. Colgrave, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, pp. 130, 131); for the significance of this point, see above, p. 287.

²²² P. Wormald, 'Bede and Benedict Biscop', in G. Bonner (ed.), *Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede* (London, 1976), pp. 141–6.

that, whatever their differences over Easter, they could look to their patron and founder as a saint who deserved to be honoured alongside the great figures of monastic tradition, Anthony, Martin and Benedict. Some such eirenic and inclusive approach was timely. Adomnán had to meet the challenge posed by Wilfrid at the Synod of Whitby to the reputation of Columba, a challenge which was partially anticipated by Cummian's Letter to Ségéne in 632/4.²²³ Yet Adomnán had recently established friendly relations with Wilfrid's pupil, Ceolfrith, abbot of Wearmouth-Jarrow, the beloved superior of Bede;²²⁴ the king of Northumbria since 685, the half-Irish scholar-king Aldfrith, was Adomnán's friend.²²⁵ At the very time of one of Adomnán's visits to Northumbria, Wilfrid had recently deeply alienated the monks of Lindisfarne when he was placed in charge of the community for a year in 687–8.²²⁶ As for the Irish, Adomnán's capacity to deploy the moral force of all Ireland and Pictland, lay and ecclesiastical, at the great assembly at Birr in 697 which promulgated the *Cáin Adomnáin* had demonstrated how an heir of Columba, now a 'Roman' himself, could achieve a major reform to take effect not just in Ireland but among 'the peoples of the Tay' to whom Columba had preached.²²⁷

(VI) INSULAR ART

Many of the greatest monuments of Insular art belong to the period when Wilfrid was attempting to remove the Irish tares from Northumbrian wheatfields. The explanation of this paradox has been largely discovered through the work of Julian Brown, but the form which he gave to his argument has reasonably been seen as claiming too much for Lindisfarne as against Iona and other Irish churches.²²⁸

First we need to set the discussion in context. Insular art is governed in part by the movements of men and of objects such as books, in part by the transference of decorative motifs from one medium to another, from metal-work to book illumination, from book to sculpture in stone and wood. Some objects are unlikely to have moved far – for example,

²²³ Stephen, *Vita S. Wilfridi*, c. 10; Cummian, *De Controversia Paschali*, p. 74, lines 114–19, excuses 'our elders . . . who you hold as a cloak for your rejection'; Columba would be the principal such elder for Ségéne, the abbot of Iona.

²²⁴ Bede, *HE* v.15; the link with Ceolfrith is established by the latter's letter to Naiton, *HE* v.21.

²²⁵ Adomnán, *VSC* ii.46. ²²⁶ Bede, *HE* iv. 29/27; Bede, *Prose Life of Cuthbert*, c. 40.

²²⁷ Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Guarantor List of *Cáin Adomnáin*'; for Bruide mac Derilei, king of the Picts, see p. 214.

²²⁸ See the survey of the state of the question by W. O'Sullivan, 'The Lindisfarne Scriptorium: For and Against', *Peritia*, 8 (1994), 80–94.

stone crosses – but others were highly mobile. The Bangor Antiphonary was written at the monastery of Bangor near Belfast in the late seventh century, but it was taken as far as Bobbio in the Apennines, a monastery founded by the Irishman Columbanus, himself a former monk of Bangor.²²⁹ We know that many Irish teachers found employment in the Carolingian Empire. In a few such cases there is direct proof for what is in any case a likely proposition – that they took books with them.²³⁰ Manuscripts are thus tricky evidence for anyone concerned with the historical geography of art. It may be possible to determine where a manuscript book was at some period during the Middle Ages (its ‘provenance’), but that is only a clue – one clue among others – as to where it was written. It may be thought that only inexpensive books were likely to travel: scholars departing from Ireland for England or the continent would hardly take the most precious productions of a monastery with them. Yet this does not remove other reasons for mobility. Gifts of precious objects were an essential feature of all early medieval societies.²³¹ Commercial exchange was also sometimes responsible: in the ninth century the Lichfield Gospels were at Llandeilo Fawr, some miles up the Tywi from Carmarthen. But they were not written and decorated there, for one of the documents added in the margin is a memorandum declaring that Arihtiud son of Gelhi bought the book for a horse of the highest value and gave it to Llandeilo.²³² If the Lichfield Gospels were written in the first half of the eighth century as is generally supposed, they had found a new home within a hundred years. In the tenth century they reached their present home at Lichfield. As this example shows, precious books were liable to move from one place to another not only by gift, by plunder or by the foundation of one monastery by monks from another, but also by sale.

As books moved so did scribes. Æthelwulf’s *De Abbatibus*, written in the ninth century, records the foundation of a Northumbrian monastery

²²⁹ *CLA* iii.311.

²³⁰ *The Commentary on the Psalms with Glosses in Old-Irish preserved in the Ambrosian Library (MS. C 301 inf.): Collotype Facsimile*, with introd. by R. I. Best (Dublin, 1936).

²³¹ Compare the theory that the Echternach Gospels were just such a gift from Lindisfarne to St Willibrord in Frisia: T. J. Brown in T. D. Kendrick *et al.*, *Codex Evangeliorum Quattuor Lindisfarnensis* (Olten/Lausanne, 1956–60), pp. 103–4.

²³² *Book of Llan Dâw*, ed. Gwenogvryn Evans and Rhys, p. xliii, discussed by D. Jenkins and M. E. Owen, ‘The Welsh Marginalia in the Lichfield Gospels’, *CMCS*, 5 (summer 1983), 48. A half-way house is Boniface sending gold for Abbess Eadburg of Minster-in-Thanet to arrange for her nuns to produce a de luxe copy of the epistles of St Peter: *Die Briefe des heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus*, ed. M. Tangl (Berlin, 1916), no. 35, tr. C. H. Talbot, *The Anglo-Saxon Missionaries in Germany* (London, 1954), pp. 91–2, no. 21.

early in the eighth. One of the first monks was an Irishman, Ultán, who is praised as a scribe and an illuminator: 'he could ornament books with fair markings and thus by this skill he made the appearance of the letters delightful one by one so that no modern scribe is able to count himself his equal'.²³³

On the other hand, the man who gave his advice on the foundation was a Northumbrian living in Ireland, Ecgberht.²³⁴ One of Ecgberht's followers was a Deiran, Willibrord, who had been a monk at Wilfrid's foundation at Ripon until about 678, then spent twelve years in Ireland with Ecgberht, after which he was sent to preach Christianity to the Frisians.²³⁵ Willibrord thus moved from the southern part of Northumbria to Ireland and later to the continent.²³⁶ Both of these movements, of scribes and of books, were involved in the conversion of Ireland, principally from Britain. The links created across the Irish Sea by British missionaries were the first basis of Insular art. The consequent drawing together of the different parts of the British Isles under the aegis of Christianity was continued by Irish missionaries to the Picts and to the English. The principal symbols, in the art of the book, of that drawing together were the Insular hierarchy of scripts, from cursive minuscule to the most formal half-uncial, and the art of the great Gospel-Books. The scripts were a local development of some of the main scripts of Late Antiquity, while the art of the Gospel-Books was an extraordinarily beautiful vehicle for the consecration of the holy book created in the seventh century from several sources including an Irish tradition going back to the Celtic La Tène, Pictish sculpture, English and Celtic metal-work.

Of the two problems which afflict anyone attempting to place the original home of a manuscript – namely that books move and so do scribes – both affect metal workers and their artefacts, but only the second sculpture in stone.²³⁷ This makes it tempting to give great weight

²³³ Æthelwulf, *De Abbatibus*, ed. and tr. A. Campbell (Oxford, 1967), pp. 18–19.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 10–15.

²³⁵ Bede, *HE* v. 10–11; Alcuin, *Vita Willibrordi*, ed. W. Levison, MGH SRM 7, pp. 81–141, cc. 3–5; W. Levison, *England and the Continent in the Eighth Century* (Oxford, 1946), chap. 3; idem, 'St Willibrord and his Place in History', in *Aus rheinischer und fränkischer Frühzeit* (Düsseldorf, 1948), pp. 314–29.

²³⁶ Of Willibrord's own hand Lowe (*Codices Latini Antiquiores*, v, p. vi) remarked kindly, 'The script is personal and shows that to be a man of God you do not have to be an expert scribe.' It is illustrated at *CLA* v.606a. Perhaps a certain confusion was excusable, for Wilfrid's Ripon and the monastery of Ecgberht in Ireland were probably dissimilar in their scribal traditions.

²³⁷ As shown by the Alnmouth stone signed by one Myredah (i.e. Muiredach): R. Cramp, *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Sculpture*, i, *County Durham and Northumberland* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 161–2; discussed by J. Higgitt, 'Words and Crosses: The Inscribed Stone Cross in Early Medieval Britain and Ireland', in J. Higgitt (ed.), *Early Medieval Sculpture in Britain and Ireland*, BAR, British Series 152 (Oxford, 1986), p. 126.

to sculpture in arguments over the origin of books or metal work. The eagle symbol for John the Evangelist in Corpus Christi College Cambridge MS 197B is very close indeed to the eagle inscribed in stone at the Knowe of Burrian in the Orkneys.²³⁸ We can assume that the eagle in stone was always at its present site; yet it does not follow that the manuscript was written in Pictish territory, though some connection between the two representations must be admitted. It is always possible that the sculpture represents a transference to stone from wood-carving, or from an image cut into bone, or, much less probably, of a manuscript drawing. Indeed, sculptors may regularly have used 'trial-pieces'.²³⁹ Once this is granted, the mobility of such trial-pieces, as well as of scribes and books, may lie behind the dissemination of motifs which then appear in sculpture.

The most active artistic patron in Northumbria during the 670s was Wilfrid. His *Life* by Stephen contains a set-piece description of the founding and dedication of the church of Ripon early in the 670s.²⁴⁰ The *Life* was written from a Ripon standpoint and thus devotes more attention to this foundation than to Wilfrid's other chief Northumbrian church at Hexham. The dedication of Ripon was described by Stephen as a wedding-feast. Wilfrid's new church was a bridal chamber for the marriage between Christ and the Christian people, a chamber adorned with gold and silver and purple vestments. Like Hexham it was described as being built 'with dressed stone', and as being adorned with columns and side-chapels, *porticus*. The conscious *Romanitas* of such a building emerges from the account of Hexham in which Stephen declares that he has heard of no building on the northern side of the Alps built on such a scale.²⁴¹ Ripon was dedicated to St Peter, prince of

²³⁸ I. Henderson, *The Picts*, pp. 124–7 and Plates 37–8; G. Henderson, *From Durrow to Kells*, p. 78 and Plates 107 and 109. The manuscript is *CLA* ii.125, J. J. G. Alexander, *Insular Manuscripts, 6th to the 9th Century* (London, 1978), no. 12.

²³⁹ For example the trial-piece found in the excavation of the royal crannóg of the Uí Chernaig kings of Southern Brega, Lagore, illustrated in M. Ryan (ed.), *The Treasures of Ireland: Irish Art 3000 BC–1500 AD* (Dublin, 1983), no. 61; for a corpus of the numerous such pieces and a discussion see Uaininn O'Meadhra, *Early Christian, Viking and Romanesque Art: Motif Pieces from Ireland*, Themes and Papers in North-European Archaeology, 7 (Stockholm, 1979), and *Early Christian, Viking and Romanesque Art: Motif Pieces from Ireland. 2. A Discussion on Aspects of Find-Context and Function*, Themes and Papers in North-European Archaeology, 17 (Stockholm, 1987).

²⁴⁰ Stephen, *Vita S. Wilfridi*, c. 17.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, c. 22. From an English perspective, it should be noted, Frankish Gaul might be a source of *Romanitas*. In Bede's *History of the Abbots* (c. 5) Biscop obtained masons from Gaul to build him a church 'according to the custom of the Romans' ('iuxta Romanorum . . . morem'; cf. *Life of Ceolfrith*, c. 7). Frankish features of the architecture of Hexham would almost certainly not have made it any the less Roman in the eyes of Wilfrid.

the apostles, and endowed with estates abandoned by the British clergy, adherents, according to Stephen, of the paschal schismatics, the Quartodeciman party (*Quarta decimana pars*).²⁴² Pre-eminent, however, among the ornaments of this bridal chamber at Ripon was a manuscript of the Gospels in which the text was written 'with purest gold upon purpled leaves of parchment'. The decorative scheme was consistent: as the altar was covered in cloth of purple woven together with gold, so was the book written with golden letters upon purple parchment. As the altar was the focus of the main part of the Mass so was the Gospel-Book the focus of the opening part, the service of readings and homily inherited from the Jewish sabbath service: both received imperial ornamentation worthy of the bridal chamber in which the King of Kings would be united with his spouse, the Church. Wilfrid honoured his King of Kings as if He were a Roman Emperor, with gold and purple.

Wilfrid's Gospels were almost certainly written in uncial, as were all Latin biblical MSS written on purple parchment before the Carolingian period.²⁴³ It may be compared with the Canterbury Codex Aureus of the eighth century, now in Stockholm.²⁴⁴ Closer in time was the Codex Amiatinus, written after 688 on the orders of Ceolfrith, abbot of Wearmouth-Jarrow, in which folio 3 was written in the yellow pigment, orpiment, on purple vellum; Ceolfrith had been Wilfrid's pupil. The association of the script with Rome and thus with the Gregorian missionaries and their heirs is clear enough. The round uncial script was used in the papal scriptorium in the time of Gregory the Great; Corpus Christi College Cambridge ms 286 is likely to be a Gospel Book brought by the Gregorian missionaries to England and is written in uncial.²⁴⁵ The Roman connection of uncial is thus not a mere interpretation advanced by men such as Wilfrid. Indeed, English uncial probably takes its origin from Roman uncial of Gregory the Great's time rather than from earlier Italian models, as used to be believed.²⁴⁶ Bodleian Hatton ms 48, of the Rule of St Benedict, also in uncial, has been tentatively attributed to Wilfrid's patronage.²⁴⁷ Whether the attribution is correct or

²⁴² Stephen, *Vita S. Wilfridi*, c. 12; cf. c. 5.

²⁴³ E. A. Lowe, *Palaeographical Papers, 1907-1965*, ed. L. Bieler, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1972), ii. 400, gives a list of Latin *codices purpurati*; for his rejection of the theory that Wilfrid's Gospels are the manuscript known as the Morgan Golden Gospels, see *ibid.*, 402-13.

²⁴⁴ *CLA* xi.1642; Alexander, *Insular Manuscripts*, no. 30.

²⁴⁵ Lowe, *Codices Latini Antiquiores*, ii.126.

²⁴⁶ A. Petrucci, 'L'onciale Romana', *Studi medievali*, 3rd ser., 12 (1971), 75-132, esp. 121-7.

²⁴⁷ *The Rule of St Benedict*, ed. D. H. Farmer, *Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile*, 15 (Copenhagen, 1968), p. 25.

not, we can be confident that such a manuscript would have met with his full approval both for its content and for its form.

The target of Wilfrid's artistic challenge is best represented by the Book of Durrow.²⁴⁸ This Gospel-Book is usually dated to the second half of the seventh century, but it is quite uncertain where it was written.²⁴⁹ By c. 900 it was probably already at Durrow, Columba's main foundation in the Irish midlands.²⁵⁰ It has a colophon addressed to 'your beatitude, holy Patrick the priest' purporting to be written by a scribe named Columba. The name Columba, however, is a later change to the original colophon, and may have been made after the book reached Durrow.²⁵¹ As for the original colophon, it may itself have been copied from an earlier manuscript. The evidence of the colophon suggests Irish connections but does not show where the Book of Durrow was written. Close similarities have been detected between the scripts of the Book of Durrow and of a book from Columbanus' foundation at Bobbio in the Apennines, and this may perhaps suggest that the Book of Durrow was written in Ireland.²⁵²

What is important about the manuscript is not whether it was written in England or in Ireland, by an Englishman, a Pict or an Irishman. What matters is that the scheme of ornament already had the main repertoire of carpet pages, symbols of the evangelists, highly decorated opening pages for the individual Gospels and canon tables. Alongside decorative elements derived from the Mediterranean and the Near East, the Book of Durrow has others derived from Pictish and Germanic animal art as well as from the Irish *La Tène*.²⁵³ The Book of Durrow, therefore, exemplifies the Insular cultural province: the combination of Irish script and decoration together with Pictish and English elements is to be explained by Columba's mission to the Picts and Aidan's mission to the Bernicians and the Deirans. True, there were other ways in which English and Celtic art cross-fertilised each other: excavations and surviving representations at Dunadd, a major

²⁴⁸ *Evangeliorum Quattuor Codex Durmachensis*.

²⁴⁹ *CLA* ii.273; Alexander, *Insular Manuscripts*, no. 6; *Codex Durmachensis*, ed. Luce *at al.*, ii.95.

²⁵⁰ As indicated by an inscription on the lost book-shrine or *cumdach* provided by Flann Sinna c. 900: *Codex Durmachensis*, ii.31–2, 47.

²⁵¹ *Codex Durmachensis*, ii.17–24.

²⁵² *CLA* iv.466; further fragments discussed in M. Ferrari, 'Spigolature bobbiesi. 1. In margine ai "Codices Latini Antiquiores"', *Italia medioevale e humanistica*, 16 (1973), 9–12 and Plate III. For the connection with the Book of Durrow, see T. J. Brown, 'The Irish Element in the Insular System of Scripts to c. AD 850', in Löwe (ed.), *Die Iren und Europa*, p. 106, repr. in his *A Palaeographer's View*, p. 206.

²⁵³ G. Henderson, *From Durrow to Kells*, pp. 20–21 (trumpet spirals), 32 (metalwork at Sutton Hoo), 43–4 (Pictish models).

royal fortress of Dál Riata, demonstrate that the Irish settlements in western Scotland had artistic links both with the Picts and the English.²⁵⁴ The Sutton Hoo treasures of c. 625 include Celtic, probably British, hanging bowls alongside Germanic and Mediterranean pieces.²⁵⁵ That Dál Riata was one meeting-place of artistic traditions is not surprising: for one thing, Oswald, Oswiu and other Bernicians were in exile among the Irish for some seventeen years, many of them probably spent in Dál Riata. But the art of the great Insular Gospel-Books expressed the combination of Irish, Pictish and English elements within an instrument of religious worship; and that presupposed the missionary achievements of Iona. Adomnán's portrait of Columba was of a patron, among other things, of this far-flung mission-field, interceding during his life with the king of the Picts, Bruide, for a friend who might be taken by wind and wave to the Orkneys, and, after death, covering with his protective mantle the greater part of Oswald's small army as it went into battle against the great host of the British king Cadwallon.²⁵⁶

Wilfrid's artistic challenge, his Gospels written with letters of gold upon purpled parchment, introduced into Northumbria a Late Antique form of prestige book. It is worth looking closely at what Stephen says: according to him, Wilfrid ordered the Gospels to be written; Stephen does not say that he brought back such a book from the continent. Similarly, he is said to have ordered, for the same occasion (the dedication of Ripon), a gold case to be made, adorned with jewels, in order to house the Gospels. Wilfrid had good continental contacts, but these precious artefacts were apparently made, just like the stone churches themselves, in England. Wilfrid, that is, appears to have assembled teams of craftsmen, scribes, builders, goldsmiths, to demonstrate to the Northumbrians the superiority of Rome over Iona, of St Peter over St Columba. Nothing, neither script nor church-building nor monastic rule, was to be meekly accepted from the Irish-influenced past of Northumbria, from the days of 'the bishopric of the Irish'.

The reply to Wilfrid's challenge took the form of the great age of Insular book art. The relationship between the two is illuminated by script. The Book of Durrow is written in what has conveniently been

²⁵⁴ E. Campbell and A. Lane, 'Celtic and Germanic Interaction in Dalriada: the 7th-Century Metalworking Site at Dunadd', in R. M. Spearman and J. Higgitt (eds.), *The Age of Migrating Ideas: Early Medieval Art in Northern Britain and Ireland* (Edinburgh and Stroud, 1993), 52–63, and the Pictish symbol stone, RCAHMS, *Argyll*, 6, *Mid Argyll and Cowal* (Edinburgh, 1988), no. 248, pp. 157–9.

²⁵⁵ R. Bruce-Mitford *et al.*, *The Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial* (London, 1975–83), iii, part i, pp. 202–95, esp. 290–5. ²⁵⁶ Adomnán, *VSC* i.1; ii.42.

called Phase I of Insular half-uncial.²⁵⁷ In the years about 680–90 the change was made to Phase II, as in the Lindisfarne and Lichfield Gospels and the Book of Kells. The change involved three main alterations. First, the script became heavier: the width of the nib, and thus the width of thick pen-strokes, became greater in relation to the height of an *o*. In the Phase I half-uncial of Durrow, the *o* is five pen-widths high; in Phase II half-uncial, as in the Book of Kells, the *o* is only four pen-widths high. Secondly, the script became more regular, more careful to run along a single upper and lower line, not lifting and falling as in the Book of Durrow. Thirdly, the projecting parts of ascenders and descenders became relatively less prominent: so far as possible, letters remained within the two lines enclosing lower-case letters such as *o*, *a* and *u*. The alterations all went to make Insular half-uncial more monumental and more disciplined in appearance. Likewise, they all made half-uncial closer to uncial in total effect and grandeur.

It has been claimed that the change from Phase I to Phase II half-uncial was a deliberate attempt to give to half-uncial the monumentality of the best uncial.²⁵⁸ In other words, they did not become more similar merely because half-uncial became grander, but because someone set out to make half-uncial grander by making it more like uncial. This is a visual judgement – a judgement with which I wholly concur. Associated with the change in script was the development of the ornament to the high point reached in such books as the Lichfield and Lindisfarne Gospels and the Book of Kells.

Within the manuscripts belonging to Phase II there is a further development, found only in the Lindisfarne Gospels among the main surviving Gospel Books. Early Irish manuscripts tend to be composed of quinions, quires of five sheets of parchment, laid one on top of another and folded.²⁵⁹ This made a gathering of ten leaves or twenty pages. This practice was inherited from Antiquity, but by the sixth century the current Roman method was to make quires that were quaternions, four sheets folded to make eight leaves or sixteen pages.²⁶⁰ Augustine and the other missionaries sent by Gregory the Great brought books consisting of quaternions to England.²⁶¹ Such early English uncial manuscripts as

²⁵⁷ Brown, 'The Irish Element in the Insular System of Scripts', *Die Iren und Europa*, p. 108 (*A Palaeographer's View*, p. 208), and cf. *A Palaeographer's View*, pp. 194–8. ²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ For example, the Codex Usanianus Primus, *CLA* ii.271, Alexander, *Insular Manuscripts*, no. 1; the *Cathach* of St Columba, *CLA* ii.266, Alexander, *Insular Manuscripts*, no. 4; hence OIr *cín* (< Lat. *quinio*) 'book', 'booklet'.

²⁶⁰ Bischoff, *Latin Palaeography: Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, tr. D. Ó Crónín and D. Ganz (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 20–2; Brown, 'The Oldest Irish Manuscripts', pp. 321–6 (*A Palaeographer's View*, pp. 234–8). ²⁶¹ Such as St Augustine's Gospels, *CLA* ii.126.

the Rule of St Benedict which has been connected with Wilfrid are composed of quaternions.²⁶²

It seems likely that, in Northumbria, the choice of uncial script was a political act: in the 660s and 670s, to adopt uncial as one's most formal script was to announce to the world one's opposition to that party within the Northumbrian Church which Stephen designated the Quarto-deciman party and 'the schismatics of Britain and Ireland'. The most politically sensitive script was the grandest in the range employed by a scriptorium, the one at the top of their hierarchy of scripts. As his grand script Wilfrid preferred the Roman uncial to the Irish half-uncial introduced into Northumbria by the missionaries from Iona. They and their English followers, 'the schismatics', had not, according to Stephen, all disappeared to Ireland after the Synod of Whitby in 664, for schismatics had persuaded Oswiu to promote Chad to the see of York during Wilfrid's absence in Gaul *c.* 665.²⁶³ Although, therefore, Wilfrid had been brought up for a time in his teens at Lindisfarne, he was proud to claim that he had learnt a superior ecclesiastical discipline at Rome.²⁶⁴ Stephen presents his career throughout the 660s as a crusade against 'the schismatics of Britain and Ireland' – from the time *c.* 663 when he persuaded Alhfrith to remove the disciples of Aidan and his followers (among them Cuthbert) from Ripon to the final achievement of Alhfrith's desire for his protégé, when Theodore restored Wilfrid to the bishopric of York.²⁶⁵ From the Life, as well as from what remains at Hexham, we can see that he had a consistent programme of change which, in the nine years from 669 to 678, during which he was bishop of York, he tried to put into effect throughout much of Northumbria.

Art-historians and palaeographers usually look first to Wearmouth-Jarrow for Roman influence in Northumbria. This is excusable in that we have surviving manuscripts assignable to that monastery which can be approximately dated.²⁶⁶ But in terms of the political impact of *Romanitas* upon Northumbria, in all spheres from Easter cycles to the style and materials of church building to choice of script, Wilfrid was easily the outstanding figure. This is also important for our understanding of Lindisfarne. Wilfrid himself ruled Lindisfarne for a year after the

²⁶² Lowe, *Codices Latini Antiquiores*, ii.240.

²⁶³ Stephen, *Vita S. Wilfridi*, c. 14. Similarly in c. 12 Wilfrid is made to say to Oswiu, Alhfrith and their counsellors: 'Here in Britain there are many bishops whom it is not my part to criticise, although I know for a fact that they are Quartodecimans like the Britons and the Irish; by them people have been ordained whom the apostolic see does not receive into communion, neither them nor those who sympathise with the schismatics.' ²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, c. 5. ²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, cc. 8, 15.

²⁶⁶ Notably the Codex Amiatinus, *CLA* iii.299, Alexander, *Insular Manuscripts*, no. 7.

death of Cuthbert in 687 and the community appears to have been seriously disrupted by his actions;²⁶⁷ 687–8 was roughly the time at which Lindisfarne's preferred formal script, the half-uncial inherited from the Irish, was undergoing the major developments of which the Lindisfarne Gospels are the outcome.²⁶⁸ After Wilfrid had ruled Lindisfarne for a year, the monks of that community cannot have been unaware of the claims of uncial to be the most ideologically acceptable formal script.

Moreover, the years around 690 appear to have been the time at which the monks of Wearmouth-Jarrow were themselves learning to write uncial, probably at least fifteen years after it had been adopted at Ripon. It has been argued by D. H. Wright, and generally accepted by other scholars, that the scribes of the Codex Amiatinus were learning the uncial script.²⁶⁹ We know from the Life of Ceolfrith that the three pandects (copies of the entire Bible), of which the Codex Amiatinus is one, were commissioned by Ceolfrith himself after he became abbot of Wearmouth as well as Jarrow, in other words no earlier than 688.²⁷⁰ The three pandects will have been written by the best scribes available; if they were learning uncial at some date no earlier than 688, we must presume that before that date the monks of Wearmouth-Jarrow did not use uncial as their formal script.

There are two possible interpretations of this situation. Dr Malcolm Parkes has maintained that such were the resources of the library of Wearmouth-Jarrow collected by Benedict Biscop and Ceolfrith, 'that there would be scarcely any need to copy books for the house during the early stages of its history'.²⁷¹ It is, in other words, his view that when we look at the Codex Amiatinus we are seeing the beginnings of the scriptorium of Wearmouth-Jarrow, and that there was no scriptorium of any significance before 688. The difficulty with this point of view is that the very riches of the library assembled by Benedict Biscop and Ceolfrith are likely to have led to a demand from other churches for copies of books only available at Wearmouth-Jarrow. Parkes himself accounts for

²⁶⁷ Bede, *HE* iv.29/27; Bede, *Prose Life of St Cuthbert*, c. 40; A. Thacker, 'Lindisfarne and the Origins of the Cult of St Cuthbert', in G. Bonner *et al.* (eds.), *Saint Cuthbert, his Cult and his Community to AD 1200* (Woodbridge, 1989), pp. 103–22, esp. 116–22.

²⁶⁸ To 'half-uncial phase II': cf. Brown, in *Codex Lindisfarnensis*, ii.90 n. 4, 105 (where the term 'Phase II' is not used); for the terms Phase I and II (a distinction which he also used for minuscule), see Brown, *A Palaeographer's View*, pp. 194–5, 197–8.

²⁶⁹ D. H. Wright, 'Some Notes on English Uncial', *Traditio*, 17 (1961), 441–56.

²⁷⁰ *Vita S. Ceolfridi*, c. 20 (ed. Plummer, *Baedae Opera Historica*, p. 395).

²⁷¹ M. B. Parkes, *The Scriptorium of Wearmouth-Jarrow* (Jarrow Lecture, 1982), p. 22.

the appearance of Wearmouth-Jarrow manuscripts written in Insular minuscule by the 740s at the latest by pointing to external demand for copies of the works of Bede. Yet an external demand for copies of other works is likely to have arisen soon after the foundation of the monastery simply because Wearmouth-Jarrow had such a fine library. If, then, we reject the notion that the scriptorium only emerged after 688, it follows that it must have used another script before that date. For the more important texts the other grand script, Insular half-uncial, may have been used for at least the first fifteen years of Wearmouth's existence and the first six or seven of Jarrow's. Finally, it is worth remembering that Ceolfrith was himself a former monk of Ripon and had been ordained priest by Wilfrid. In about 676 Ceolfrith even returned from Wearmouth to Ripon because of opposition to his authority from some nobles among the monks of Wearmouth.²⁷² His allegiance to Ripon and thus to Wilfrid did not end when he collaborated with Biscop in the foundation of Wearmouth. The introduction of uncial at Wearmouth-Jarrow c. 690 may thus plausibly be connected with Wilfrid's influence after his return from exile in 687 and before he was again expelled in 692, and, in particular, with the personal link between him and Ceolfrith, now sole abbot of Wearmouth-Jarrow. We need not suppose, with Parkes, that there was no scriptorium at Wearmouth-Jarrow until after 688.

The Synod of Whitby had, therefore, created as many divisions in the Northumbrian Church as it healed. As we saw earlier, it produced three parties, whose membership was sometimes fluid, but which were distinguished by clear differences of standpoint. One party was formed by the remaining 'Hibernians', including the Englishmen who formed the community of Mayo. A middle party consisted of those English churchmen who accepted the Roman Easter and tonsure but remained loyal to the memory of Aidan and the links with Ireland: these will have included those denounced by Wilfrid, according to Stephen, for sympathising with 'the schismatics'.²⁷³ This second party was aligned with the Irish *Romani*, as shown by the influential group that formed around Ecgbærht, an Englishman who had, at the time of the great plague of 664, taken a vow to remain a *peregrinus*, outside his homeland, for the rest of his life.²⁷⁴ In 664 Ecgbærht was at a monastery called Ráith Máelsigi (now Clonmelsh) in Leinster. Since Leinster, part of southern Ireland, had

²⁷² *Vita S. Ceolfridi*, c. 8 (ed. Plummer, p. 390).

²⁷³ Stephen, *Vita S. Wilfridi*, c. 12.

²⁷⁴ Bede, *HE* iii.27.

largely conformed to the Roman paschal practice during the 630s, Ecgberht had already, by 664, aligned himself with the Irish *Romani*.²⁷⁵ He is said to have attempted to dissuade Ecgrith of Northumbria from his attack on Ireland in 684.²⁷⁶ About 690 he was the mastermind, from his Irish base, of the English mission to the Frisians.²⁷⁷ Later, perhaps c. 710, he moved to Iona where he was influential in persuading the community to change to the Roman Easter and tonsure.²⁷⁸ He was, Bede says, 'an exceedingly gentle and attractive teacher'.

Less gentle was the leader of the third party, Wilfrid. His biographer, Stephen, was prepared to suggest that both the other groups, and not just the Hibernians and the Britons, were tainted with heresy and schism. Three characteristics separated Wilfrid's group from men such as Eata, abbot and later bishop of Lindisfarne and Hexham, and from women such as Hild, abbess of Whitby, both of whom had strong personal links with Aidan. First, Wilfrid's party regarded the Hibernians and Britons as heretics and schismatics, not just as mistaken, a view emphatically rejected by Bede in his concluding eulogy of Aidan.²⁷⁹ Secondly, to judge from the letters of Aldhelm, abbot of Malmesbury and later bishop of Sherborne, some of those who supported Wilfrid sought to dissuade Englishmen from going to study in Ireland.²⁸⁰ Finally, Wilfrid's group, as we have seen, favoured explicitly Roman practices in all aspects of religious life, including the adoption of the uncial script in place of the half-uncial.

Wilfrid's public championship of the uncial script evoked a response: the half-uncial of the Book of Durrow was developed to form a script as stately as the best uncial – the change from Phase I to Phase II. The change had already occurred by the time of the Lindisfarne Gospels,

²⁷⁵ There was opposition within Leinster for a time, as suggested by the *Vita Prima S. Fintani seu Munnu*, ed. Heist, *Vitae*, cc. 29–31. St Munnu of Taghmon was an ally of Iona (Adomnán, *VSC* i.2) and a member of Columba's own kindred, Cenél Conaill. ²⁷⁶ Bede, *HE* iv.26/24.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, v.9. ²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, v.22.

²⁷⁹ Bede, *HE* iii.17. Bede's position is all the more remarkable because Lindisfarne adopted a harsher view, as shown by the uniquely authoritative last words of Cuthbert, reported by Herefrith, abbot of Lindisfarne: Bede, *Prose Life of St Cuthbert*, c. 39: 'But have no communion with those who depart from the unity of the catholic peace, either in not celebrating Easter at the proper time or in evil living.' A similar attitude is suggested by the particular image of St Peter on Cuthbert's tomb, as shown by J. Higgitt, 'The Iconography of St Peter in Anglo-Saxon England, and St Cuthbert's Coffin', in Bonner *et al.* (eds.), *St Cuthbert, his Cult and his Community*, pp. 267–85; and by the untrue claim about Cuthbert's Petrine tonsure in the Anonymous Life, i. 2 (ed. and tr. Colgrave, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, pp. 76–7).

²⁸⁰ Aldhelm, *Ep.* 5, tr. M. Lapidge and M. Herren, *Aldhelm: The Prose Works* (Ipswich, 1979), p. 163. It is very evident from *HE* iii.27 that Bede did not share this view.

which have been plausibly associated with the translation of Cuthbert's body in 698.²⁸¹ As the Lindisfarne Gospels illustrate, Phase II half-uncial was used in churches belonging to the middle party, those who accepted the Roman Easter but remained loyal to the memory of Aidan. Symptomatic of this position is the story told in the Anonymous Life of St Cuthbert, written at Lindisfarne between 688 and 705, of how, as a young man, he saw a vision in 651 of Aidan's soul being carried up to heaven by angels.²⁸² The story is of a type familiar from Adomnán's Life of St Columba, written no more than a year or two earlier;²⁸³ what is especially significant is its implication: a saint, such as Cuthbert, did not see a soul being taken up to heaven by angels if that soul was a heretic and a schismatic.

Although Lindisfarne belonged to this middle party and used half-uncial, it cannot be shown that Phase II half-uncial was developed there rather than in other churches of the same outlook. The problem is that there are only two churches in Northumbria to which surviving manuscripts can be securely attributed: Wearmouth-Jarrow and Lindisfarne. This is a consequence of two accidents: first, the survival of some manuscripts in the possession of the community at Lindisfarne (later to move to Chester-le-Street and later still to Durham), and, secondly, the tenth-century colophon to the Lindisfarne Gospels, and the conjoined evidence of the Codex Amiatinus and the Anonymous Life of Ceolfrith, abbot of Wearmouth-Jarrow. Other major churches of the middle party, such as Whitby, Lastingham and Melrose, are very likely to have had active scriptoria.²⁸⁴ The royal connections of Whitby and its role as the place of education of several bishops gave it unusual authority and wide connections.²⁸⁵ Lindisfarne is a plausible centre for the development of

²⁸¹ Brown in *Codex Lindisfarnensis*, ii.11–16; on the other hand, D. Ó Cróinín, 'Pride and Prejudice', *Peritia*, 1 (1982), 357–8, argues for a date closer to 721 than to 698.

²⁸² Anonymous Life of St Cuthbert, i.5 (ed. Colgrave, pp. 68–71).

²⁸³ Adomnán, *VSC* iii.6–14, 22; D. A. Bullough, 'Columba, Adomnán and the Achievement of Iona', *Scottish Historical Review*, 43 (1964), 111–30, 44 (1965), 17–33, Part I, 129–30, points to possible links, probably indirect, between Adomnán's Life of Columba and the contemporary or very slightly later Anonymous Life of Cuthbert.

²⁸⁴ Cf. Whitby (R. Cramp, 'A Reconsideration of the Monastic Site of Whitby', in Spearman and Higgin (eds.), *The Age of Migrating Ideas*, pp. 64–73), Chelles (B. Bischoff, 'Die Kölner Nonnenhandschriften und das Skriptorium von Chelles', in his *Mittelalterliche Studien*, i.16–34) and Minster-in-Thane (Boniface, *Ep.*, nos. 29, 30, 35, in *S. Bonifatii et Lullii Epistolae*, ed. M. Tangl, MGH, Epp. Selectae [Berlin, 1916], pp. 52–4, 60).

²⁸⁵ Whitby is the kind of church which might have produced the Lichfield Gospels, since its connections extended to the Welsh marches: Bede, *HE* iv.23 (on Offor); Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England, 600–800*, pp. 184–6. If its *incipit* page was influenced by that in the

Phase II half-uncial but other Northumbrian churches also have good claims. The argument for the proposition that Phase II half-uncial was developed somewhere in Northumbria is, however, very strong. It was a response to uncial; within Northumbria there were two parties using two grand scripts as signs of where they stood in the ecclesiastical politics of the day; the conflict between two outlooks and two parties was the context for emulation and competition in the production of the sacred book. On the other hand, although this development is to be attributed to Northumbria, the new and more stately form of Insular half-uncial spread to Ireland, from where the script had originally been introduced to England by Aidan and his collaborators, and also to the Frisian mission-field established by the disciples of Ecgrberht. The place of writing of most major Insular illuminated manuscripts cannot be located with any approach to certainty, but an exception is Mac Regol's Gospels, written at Birr on the borders of Munster and Mide about 800.²⁸⁶ This manuscript dates the beginning of the decline in the art of the Insular Gospel-Book and demonstrates the use of Phase II half-uncial in Ireland. This version of half-uncial, therefore, although first developed in Northumbria as an emblem of the middle party, English *Romani* loyal to the tradition of Aidan, was widely adopted as the grandest version of Insular script.

The attitude of the middle party to Aidan and the shaping of Bede's portrait of him can be more closely defined by considering the events leading up to the translation of St Cuthbert and the writing and illumination of the Lindisfarne Gospels. In 678, Wilfrid, bishop of York, left Northumbria for Rome, probably because he refused to accept the division of his diocese required by King Ecgrfrith and Archbishop Theodore.²⁸⁷ King and archbishop had apparently agreed that the expansion of the kingdom to include Lindsey to the south and the southern parts of Pictland to the north had made the diocese of York

Lindisfarne Gospels, it was produced after c. 698. In that case, it is unlikely to have been produced at Lindisfarne since it was composed of quinions rather than quaternions. The importance of the change may be marked by Bede's statement in his *Prose Life of St Cuthbert*, c. 8, that the copy of St John's Gospel at Melrose, a dependent house of Lindisfarne, used by Boisil in the week before his death to instruct the young Cuthbert was composed of quaternions. This may be all the more significant since it was very probably untrue. The story, apparently from Herefrith, who was anxious to emphasise the detachment of Lindisfarne from its 'schismatic' past (see Bede, *Prose Life*, c. 39), may have been edited before it came to Bede.

²⁸⁶ *CLA* ii.231; Alexander, *Insular Manuscripts*, no. 54; Mac Regol died in 822 (AU).

²⁸⁷ Bede, *HE* iv.12; N. Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury* (Leicester, 1984), pp. 72-6.

unacceptably large.²⁸⁸ Wilfrid might be left as one of the bishops of the Northumbrians but new bishops were to be consecrated by Theodore. Among these new bishoprics was to be Hexham, previously Wilfrid's possession, given him by Queen Æthelthryth.²⁸⁹ Wilfrid's departure left the ground clear for the middle party: Eata, disciple of Aidan, was consecrated to Lindisfarne and Hexham; Bosa, monk of Whitby, to York; Eadhæd (Chad's priest in 665 when Chad, then abbot of Lastingham, was consecrated bishop of York in place of Wilfrid) was consecrated bishop of Lindsey.

Wilfrid appealed to Rome, where a compromise settlement was ordered.²⁹⁰ There were still to be several bishoprics in place of the one vast diocese, but the bishops consecrated in 678 were to be removed. New bishops, acceptable to Wilfrid, were to be consecrated by Archbishop Theodore. Wilfrid himself was to receive his old see back, that is, presumably, York. The papacy may not have known what this settlement entailed in practice. The effect would have been to undermine the power of the middle party in Northumbria and to force Theodore back into alliance with Wilfrid. In spite of the authority of Rome, the settlement was not put into effect.²⁹¹ While this impasse was still continuing, Cuthbert, then anchorite of Farne, was persuaded in 684 to accept consecration as bishop of Lindisfarne: the ceremony took place in York in the spring of 685.²⁹² If the papal compromise were now to be put into effect, it could entail the removal from his see of a man already acknowledged to be of exceptional holiness.

Two months after Cuthbert's consecration, King Ecgrith was defeated and killed at Nechtanes Mere, Dunnichen Moss near Forfar.²⁹³ Two years later, in 687, Cuthbert died.²⁹⁴ This gave the new king, Aldfrith, an opportunity to attempt his own compromise. The king had, years before, been sponsored in confirmation by Aldhelm, abbot of Malmesbury, a strong supporter of Wilfrid in his exile.²⁹⁵ Perhaps because of this connection and because of Aldfrith's need to consolidate

²⁸⁸ Lindsey had been conquered from the Mercians before the death of Wulfhere in 675 and after the accession of Ecgrith, dated by Bede to 670: Bede, *HE* iv.12, Stephen, *Vita S. Wilfridi*, c. 20; when, in 679, Ecgrith lost control of Lindsey, its bishop, Eadhæd took over Wilfrid's principal church of Ripon: Bede, *HE* iv.12.

²⁸⁹ Stephen, *Vita S. Wilfridi*, c. 22; if this was the see offered to Wilfrid in 678, the arrangement would have entailed moving him from York; for reasons why that would have been unacceptable to him see below, pp. 429–33. ²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, c. 32. ²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, c. 34.

²⁹² Bede, *HE* iv.28/26; this entailed moving Eata to Hexham, making it less easy to effect a compromise with Wilfrid. ²⁹³ Bede, *HE* iv.26/24. ²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, iv.29/27.

²⁹⁵ Aldhelm, *Epistola ad Acircium*, c. 1, ed. Ehwald, p. 61, tr. in Lapidge and Herren, *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, p. 34; *Ep.* 12, ed. Ehwald, pp. 500–2, tr. Lapidge and Herren, pp. 168–70.

his kingdom in the wake of a major defeat, Wilfrid was allowed to return from exile and was put in charge of Lindisfarne, the see left vacant by Cuthbert's death.²⁹⁶ The first years of Aldfrith's reign were marked by the healing of broken alliances. Adomnán, abbot of Iona, twice visited the king, once in 685–6 and then two years later.²⁹⁷ As a result, he was able to bring back the captives taken from Brega in 684 by Ecgrith's invading army.²⁹⁸

Wilfrid's year in charge of Lindisfarne, 687–8, was a disaster.²⁹⁹ His approach to the community of Aidan and Cuthbert appears to have been thoroughly confrontational. In 688 Eadberht was consecrated bishop of Lindisfarne; he was enthusiastically loyal to the traditions of the community. On the other hand, 688 was also the year in which Ceolfrith became abbot of both Wearmouth and Jarrow, henceforth to be ruled as a single community.³⁰⁰ He was Wilfrid's pupil and it was he who introduced uncial as the grand script of Wearmouth-Jarrow. Ceolfrith, however, loyal to Wilfrid though he may have been, was much readier to build bridges to other parties. He had prolonged conversations with Adomnán, abbot of Iona, possibly in 688, the very year in which he became abbot of both Wearmouth and Jarrow.³⁰¹ Similarly, he appears to have established a firm friendship with Eadberht, bishop of Lindisfarne 688–98, and also with Eadberht's successor, Eadfrith. Eadfrith was the scribe of the Lindisfarne Gospels, the text of which was probably copied from a manuscript in the possession of Wearmouth-Jarrow.³⁰² It is possible, also, that the Stonyhurst Gospel of St John, written at Wearmouth-Jarrow, was placed in the tomb of St Cuthbert, when the saint's body was enshrined in 698.³⁰³ This Gospel was written in a lighter version of uncial, known as capitular uncial because it was used in chapter headings in Insular minuscule manuscripts. These links between the two communities were to lead to Bede's two Lives of St Cuthbert, one in verse and the other in prose.³⁰⁴

The alliance between Lindisfarne and Wearmouth-Jarrow, which evidently survived Wilfrid's second expulsion from Northumbria in 692,

²⁹⁶ Bede, *HE* iv.29/27; Stephen, *Vita S. Wilfridi*, c. 44.

²⁹⁷ Adomnán, *VSC* ii.46; AU 687.5; Bede, *HE* v.15.

²⁹⁸ AU 687.5.

²⁹⁹ See above, n. 267.

³⁰⁰ Bede, *Historia Abbatum*, c. 15: 'ac utrique monasterio, uel, sicut rectius dicere possumus, in duobus locis posito uni monasterio', echoing the Anonymous *Vita Ceolfridi*, c. 19.

³⁰¹ Bede, *HE* v.15, 21.

³⁰² The exemplar has not been identified but it is related to *Codices Latini Antiquiores*, ii.150 (the uncial MS bound up with the Durham Gospels): *Codex Lindisfarnensis*, ii.56–8.

³⁰³ T. J. Brown, *The Stonyhurst Gospel of Saint John*, Roxburghe Club (Oxford, 1969), pp. 13, 28, 42–3.

³⁰⁴ Cf. Thacker, 'Lindisfarne and the Origins of the Cult of St Cuthbert', 117–22.

was the immediate context of the Lindisfarne Gospels. Manuscripts such as the Durham and Lichfield Gospels, although in Phase II half-uncial, remained within an Irish tradition of book-production as well as within the Insular artistic tradition created as part of the missionary achievement of Iona. In particular, they, like most earlier Irish books, were composed of quinions; the Lindisfarne Gospels, however, were composed of quaternions. Eadfrith and the Lindisfarne scriptorium had, therefore, abandoned the quinions favoured by the Irish in favour of the quaternion, the normal quire of Rome and the rest of continental Latin Europe. Eadfrith also adopted the two-column layout characteristic of uncial manuscripts, while the portrait of the evangelist Matthew was directly indebted to a portrait of the Old-Testament scribe Ezra in a manuscript belonging to Wearmouth-Jarrow.³⁰⁵ Textual, artistic and codicological evidence all point to the close ties between Lindisfarne and Wearmouth-Jarrow. Because of that alliance the Lindisfarne Gospels, among all the great Insular illuminated manuscripts, is the most indebted to that other tradition of book-production, associated with the uncial script first introduced into Northumbria, so far as we know, by Wilfrid at Ripon.

The rapprochement between Lindisfarne and Wearmouth-Jarrow also lay behind Bede's portrait of Aidan. At some date after 678, possibly in the period from 684 to 685 when he spent some time in Northumbria, Archbishop Theodore dedicated the church at Lindisfarne to St Peter. Subsequently the body of Aidan was translated from the monastic cemetery at Lindisfarne and buried within the church on the right-hand side of the altar.³⁰⁶ This practice of translation, often associated with placing the body in a shrine above ground ('elevation') in close proximity to the altar, was coming into fashion in England in the last decade of the seventh century. The bodies of Edwin and Oswald, kings of Northumbria, were translated at about the same time;³⁰⁷ Æthelthryth was enshrined at Ely and Chad at Lichfield.³⁰⁸ Aidan's was an intermediate case, since it appears from Bede's words that he, like

³⁰⁵ *Codex Lindisfarnensis*, ii.143–57.

³⁰⁶ Bede, *HE* iii.17, showing that the translation followed the dedication; iii.25, showing that it was Theodore who dedicated the church to St Peter. The right-hand side of the altar was where Cuthbert was buried in 687, but in 698 brought above ground and enshrined.

³⁰⁷ Whitby *Life of Gregory the Great*, c. 18, ed. and tr. B. Colgrave, *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great* (Kansas, 1968), pp. 100–3; and cf. Bede, *HE* iii.24; *ibid.*, ii.11 (after Æthelred's accession in 675 and before Osthryth's death in 697: *ibid.*, v.24).

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, iv.3 (Chad first buried next to, but outside, the church of St Mary, but subsequently translated into the church of St Peter, when that had been built); iv.19/17 (Æthelthryth translated sixteen years after her death, which itself took place about 685).

Cuthbert in 687, was buried below ground on the south side of the altar. The pre-eminent shrine at Lindisfarne would be that of St Cuthbert, partly because his body was found to be incorrupt when elevated in 698. Yet the cults of Aidan and Cuthbert were not in opposition: the veneration of both had its home within the Lindisfarne community and the other churches of the middle party. Both cults were in some degree a response to Wilfrid's challenge to the reputation of Lindisfarne; both buttressed the position of the middle party in Northumbria against any recrudescence of Wilfrid's power based on the papal judgement of 680. After Aldfrith's death in 705, Wilfrid was finally allowed back into Northumbria, but only on the basis that he should be given back the churches of Ripon and Hexham. In Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, Wilfrid too takes an honoured place, but Aidan and Cuthbert were put forward as the supreme models that a bishop should follow. Unlike Aldhelm, Bede approved of Englishmen seeking a scholarly education in Ireland; and, unlike Wilfrid, Bede believed that Aidan and Columba, though mistaken on the the subject of Easter and the tonsure, were neither heretics nor schismatics. His views owed much to the need felt by Lindisfarne, in particular, and the middle party generally to defend the memory of a saint against the onslaught of Wilfrid. It may also have owed something to the link forged between his abbot, Ceolfrith, and the author of the *Life of St Columba*, Adomnán.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Columbanus and his disciples

In 590 or 591, Columbanus, then a monk at the monastery of Bangor on the south side of Belfast Lough, received the permission of his abbot, Comgall, to leave Ireland as a *peregrinus*, one who has to live as an exile.¹ He was already an alien of a kind, in that he was a Leinsterman by birth and had left his native province, first to further his education by seeking out a renowned teacher named Sinell, and secondly by entering the monastery of Bangor in the province of Ulster. Now he sought Comgall's support for his intention to find a place of more intense exile.² His journey took him via Brittany to Burgundy, the Merovingian kingdom probably still ruled by Guntram.³ By this journey, Columbanus precipitated a fundamental change in Frankish Christianity. He is best understood, however, as instigating change rather than causing it single-handedly; he achieved so much because he and his disciples secured the support of Frankish kings and aristocrats. In addition, moreover, to his influence in Francia, his achievements, and the controversies they aroused, were to have important consequences both for the country of his birth and for Anglo-Saxon England.⁴

Columbanus is a major figure for two reasons. First, he is the greatest

¹ Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, 4 (ed. Krusch, MGH SRG in usum Schol., 160). On this Life see C. Stancliffe, 'Jonas's *Life of Columbanus and his Disciples*', in J. Carey, M. Herbert and P. Ó Riain (eds.), *Studies in Irish Hagiography* (Dublin, 2000).

² For the distinction between ordinary *peregrinatio* and *potior peregrinatio*, 'pilgrimage' and 'superior pilgrimage', made by an unnamed nun to Columbanus in Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, 3 (ed. Krusch, 156.20), see T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'The Social Background to Irish *Peregrinatio*', pp. 43–4.

³ On the route see Krusch, note on 'Britannicos sinus', Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, i.4, who rightly compares i.21, 'Brittanico sinu' meaning the sea at the mouth of the Loire; E. James, 'Ireland and Western Gaul in the Merovingian Period', in D. Whitelock et al. (eds.), *Ireland in Early Mediaeval Europe: Studies in Memory of Kathleen Hughes* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 375–6. On the chronology, see D. A. Bullough, 'The Career of Columbanus', in Lapidge (ed.), *Columbanus: Studies on the Latin Writings* pp. 10–11. Guntram died on 28 March in his thirty-third year (= 593); Fredegar, *Chronica*, ed. B. Krusch, MGH SRM ii.1–193, iv.14.

⁴ J. Campbell, 'The First Century of English Christianity', in his *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History*, pp. 56–9.

of the *peregrini* who left Ireland for continental Europe. In Britain there were other major figures, in particular Columba of Iona and Aidan, the bishop of the Northumbrians; but amongst those Irishmen who went to the continent, such as Fursa, none had so great an influence as Columbanus. Secondly, his writings, taken together with the *Life* by Jonas, constitute the only body of evidence about Irish monasticism before the late seventh century that is both varied in content and considerable in extent. True, the monastic life of his disciples was partly shaped by ideas and personalities which were not Irish; but this is also true of the monasticism of Iona. The notion that the Irish were only influenced by other nations when they had themselves left Ireland does not stand up to a careful review of the evidence. It is not the case, for example, that Irishmen once abroad never returned to Ireland, or that books only travelled from Ireland to Britain and to the continent and never in the reverse direction.⁵ One channel of communication was between Columbanian monasteries in Francia and Italy and Ireland, as illustrated by the example of Agilbert of Jouarre, who came from one of the centres of Columbanian monasticism close to Paris, where he ended his days as bishop, but spent part of his life as a student in Ireland and then as bishop of the West Saxons.⁶ Columbanus, therefore, did not cease to have any importance for his native country when he sailed for the continent.

There is, however, a particular problem facing the student of Columbanus' career. It is created by a view which may be expressed as follows: Jonas' *Life* asserts an identity of purpose and practice between master and disciple; yet it was written for men and women in whose time, so it is claimed, Columbanus' practice of the monastic life had been transformed into something different, variously termed by modern scholars *Irofränkisch* or 'Columbanian' (the latter with emphatic quotation marks).⁷ An implication of this view is that it was precisely because

⁵ The poem of Colmán nepos Craquavist, *Dum subito properas dulces inuisere terras*, MGH Poetae Latini Aevi Carolini, vi.180–2, is addressed to an Irishman returning to Ireland; Columbanus, *Ep.* i.4, shows that the paschal table of Victorius of Aquitaine was known to Irish scholars before he left Bangor.

⁶ Bede, *HE*, iii.7; Campbell, 'The First Century of English Christianity', p. 58; Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, p. 68.

⁷ F. Prinz, *Frühes Mönchtum im Frankenreich*, Part II, *passim*; A. Dierkens, 'Prologomènes à une histoire des relations culturelles entre les Îles Britanniques et le continent pendant le haut moyen âge: la diffusion du monachisme dit columbanien ou iro-franc dans quelques monastères de la région parisienne au VII^e siècle et la politique de la reine Bathilde', in H. Atsma (ed.), *La Neustrie: les pays au nord de la Loire de 650 à 850*, Beihefte zu Francia 16/1 and 16/2 (Sigmaringen, 1989), ii.371–94; I. N. Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms, 450–751* (London, 1994), pp. 184–9.

Columbanus' disciples had jettisoned his views on Easter, had substituted assiduous cultivation of papal, episcopal, royal and aristocratic support for fearless criticism of the failings of popes and royal courts, and had attached the much longer and more detailed Rule of St Benedict to the Rule composed by Columbanus that it was necessary for Jonas to organise the Life as he did. It expressed an unbroken tradition, stemming from Columbanus and still exemplified in his disciples, because tradition had, in reality, been broken.⁸

The Life, written by a man who had entered Bobbio by 618, no more than three years after Columbanus' death, and who had close knowledge of the saint's disciples, has an unusual authority but also an unusual structure.⁹ The saint dies halfway through the text, at the end of the first book. Jonas' second book, still part of the *Vita S. Columbani*, gives brief lives of Athala, abbot of Bobbio, and Eustasius, abbot of Luxeuil, a series of narratives about the nunnery of Faremoutiers-en-Brie, an account of Bertulf, third abbot of Bobbio and some briefer anecdotes about particular monks. The whole Life, therefore, is organised around Columbanus' death, a first book leading up to his death, and a second book on what his disciples made of his spiritual inheritance; yet the death itself is not given much space.¹⁰ In itself this centring of the text on the holy man's other 'birth', from a world of sin and decay into the fatherland where he would find the peace and joy of the soul, is not surprising.¹¹ What we might expect, following the hagiographical practice of Gregory of Tours, would be a first section on the holy man's life in this world and a concluding section on the miracles; the miracles would be centred at his shrine and would demonstrate his status as a friend of God; he would thus be a powerful intercessor in heaven on behalf of those in this world who sought him as patron.¹² In other words, the two parts, tied together by the second birth, would be, first, the life and then the cult. For Gregory of Tours, the miracle after death was a much more certain indication of the saint's holiness than the miracle during his lifetime.¹³

⁸ Cf. Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, ii.1, 'per vestigia magistri secutus'.

⁹ A. de Vogüé, *Jonas de Bobbio: Vie de saint Colomban et de ses disciples* (Bégrolles-en-Mauges, 1988), p. 19, argues that he had entered by February 617, not much more than a year after Columbanus' death.

¹⁰ Contrast Adomnán, *VSC* iii.23.

¹¹ For the notion of heaven as the fatherland and of life in this world as a pilgrimage in a foreign land, see *Instructiones*, v–vi (ed. Walker, *S. Columbani Opera*, 84–90).

¹² A pleasant example is the story of St Peter and the wife of Aetius: Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* ii.7. See P. R. L. Brown, *Relics and Social Status in the Age of Gregory of Tours*, Stenton Lecture 1976 (Reading, 1977), reprinted in his *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (London, 1982), pp. 222–50.

¹³ Gregory of Tours, *Vita Patrum*, ii.2; tr. E. James, *Gregory of Tours: Life of the Fathers* (Liverpool, 1985), p. 37.

Winnoc the Breton – another Celtic ascetic of the generation before Columbanus – might seem to be holy and even be a miracle-worker, yet in the end he took to drink and became insane.¹⁴ It is not, then, the formal structure of the *Vita S. Columbani*, divided between the life of the saint and the period after his death, which is surprising, but the contents of the second book. We find there no miracles at a shrine, no relics of the holy man, but only disciples; and these disciples are not filled with *reverentia* for physical relics, signs in the world of sense-impressions of the hidden sanctity of the holy man, but are fired by love of Columbanus' Rule and example. A scriptural parallel is the work of Luke: a Gospel which takes the story up to the Ascension of Christ, completed by the Acts of the Apostles, which recounts the achievements and sufferings of Christ's principal disciples.¹⁵

The primary reason for this concern for Columbanus as monastic teacher, rather than as a heavenly patron working miracles through a public shrine, is that Jonas' Life is addressed to monks and nuns rather than to a wider audience.¹⁶ The physical setting in which the Life made sense, in terms of both subject matter and readership, was the rural monastery, not the great suburban shrines controlled by bishops and kings, such as those of St Medard at Soissons, St Martin at Tours or St Hilary at Poitiers.¹⁷ Yet the contrast is wider than simply the intended audience of a saint's Life. When Nicetius, bishop of Trier, wrote a letter in the 560s to Chlodosuinth, granddaughter of Clovis and wife of Alboin, king of the Lombards, he hoped that she might persuade her husband to reject Arianism in favour of Catholicism by the powerful argument of the Gallic saints' cults:

If he commands his envoys to come to the Lord Martin for his feast which is celebrated on 11 November, let him send them, and, if they dare, let them then attempt something where today we behold the blind see, where the deaf receive their hearing and the dumb healing.¹⁸

Nicetius made these claims not just for the shrine of St Martin but also for Hilary of Poitiers, Germanus of Auxerre, Lupus of Troyes, Medard

¹⁴ Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* v.21; viii.34.

¹⁵ W. Berschin, *Biographie und Epochenstil im lateinischen Mittelalter*, ii, *Merowingische Biographie, Italien, Spanien und die Inseln im frühen Mittelalter*, Quellen und Untersuchungen zur lateinischen Philologie des Mittelalters, 9 (Stuttgart, 1988), p. 28, argues that the resemblance is deliberate.

¹⁶ I. N. Wood, 'The Vita Columbani and Merovingian Hagiography', *Peritia*, 1 (1982), 67–8.

¹⁷ For the latter see R. Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul* (Princeton, NJ, 1993), p. 129.

¹⁸ Nicetius of Trier, Letter to Chlodosuinth, *Epp. Austrasicae*, no. 8, § 15 (ed. Dümmler, MGH, Epp. Mer. et Karol. Aevi, i.121).

of Soissons and Remigius of Reims. Even though they were men, they were all confessed by the demons to be 'lords', that is, they exercised authority over the evil spirits within this world. They could do such things because they were God's friends and so deployed His power. Nicetius plainly believed that Arianism was shown to be false by the absence, within its tradition of Christianity, of any great saints' cults. Yet Bobbio, the resting-place of Columbanus' body, was patronised by the papacy not because it contained a shrine which could impress the minds of both Arian and pagan Lombards, but because of the power of a way of life. The holiness of a community and of their rule, inherited from Columbanus, had the capacity to draw men's minds to the Catholic faith.

There is, however, a further explanation of the character of Jonas' Life. The Irish were slow to show any interest in the cult of bodily relics.¹⁹ The contrast between their attitudes, even as late as 700, and those of the Frankish Church can be shown by comparing Gregory of Tours' account of the Jura fathers and Adomnán's Life of Columba. Gregory has a story about a conversation between Lupicinus and Romanus, founders of a group of monasteries in the Jura mountains, just over 100 miles from Luxeuil.²⁰ The younger brother, Lupicinus, asked Romanus where he would like to be buried. He replied that he did not wish his body to lie in his monastery but rather outside the enclosure so that his grave could be visited by laymen and women. The conversation reveals a conflict in the monastic life of Gaul in the fifth and sixth centuries; the esteem of a monastic tradition was tied to the reputation of the founder who had established that particular way of life; yet, if he was regarded as a great saint, as one who had lordship over the demons, his grave would become a shrine to which all would resort, clerical and lay, men and women, sick and healthy, honest and criminal.²¹ The presence of a great shrine made a mockery of any monastic intention to live in 'the desert', to follow the example of Anthony by 'going up-country' (*anachorein*, hence anchorite), away from the busy distractions of crowded humanity. Few places were as busy and distracted in sixth-century Gaul as the great cult centres.

¹⁹ C. Stancliffe, *The Earliest Irish Saints' Lives* (forthcoming). One cannot then argue, as does Dierkens, 'Prologomènes à une histoire des relations entre les Îles Britanniques et le continent', 385–8, that a particular monastery (Chelles in this case) was exempt from Irish influence because there were no Irish saint's relics there. ²⁰ Gregory of Tours, *Vita Patrum*, i.6 (ed. Krusch, p. 217).

²¹ Compare the remarks attributed to the dying Cuthbert in Bede's Prose Life, c. 37.

The monastery of St Martin outside the walls of Tours was the greatest of all such centres in Gaul. As a model of monastic life it was of little significance.²² At the opposite extreme comes Iona. There was no shrine for Columba even by the time of his hagiographer, Adomnán, who wrote about a hundred years after the saint's death. Columba's remains were not within a church but lay in the monastic cemetery marked only by a stone on which he had rested his head when he slept. The holy *patronus* slept in death as he had slept in life, a monk among other monks, awaiting the resurrection of the body.²³ It was not even crucial for his monks to be buried in the same cemetery as their patron. One of Columba's monks, named Librán, was told by the saint that 'your resurrection will not be in Britain, but in Ireland'. On hearing this, Librán wept, but was comforted by Columba: 'Rise, and do not be grieved. You will die in one of my monasteries; and your share in the Kingdom will be with my chosen monks, and with them you will awake from the sleep of death into the resurrection of life.'²⁴ Columba was 'a column of many churches',²⁵ and it was essential that his faithful monks, wherever they were, should have confidence that they would 'rise with the saints', and especially with their patron.²⁶ 'The place of resurrection' of a monastic founder is a standard theme of Irish hagiography;²⁷ but, with one or two significant exceptions,²⁸ it was not a shrine visited by the people but a grave in a monastic cemetery within the enclosure. True, one or two saints' Lives do concern themselves with the visitors to the grave; yet the latter are not laymen but angels.²⁹ In the case of Columba, Adomnán drives the point home by telling a story of an unthinking remark.³⁰ One of his monks said to Columba, 'After your death it is thought that the entire population of these provinces will row over for the celebration of your funeral and fill this island of Iona'. To which the holy man replied:

No, my son, it will not turn out as you say. For a mixed crowd of people will in no way be able to come to my funeral. Only the monks of my community will fulfil the rites of my burial and worthily perform the ceremonies of my funeral.

²² Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* ix.39–40; the letter of Eufronius, bishop of Tours, and other bishops to Radegund of Poitiers, given *ibid.*, ix.39, recommended St Martin as a model of monastic leadership but accepted that the Rule followed in the nunnery would be that of Caesarius of Arles. Prinz, *Frühes Mönchtum im Frankenreich*, pp. 22–7. ²³ Adomnán, *VSC* iii.23 (fo. 129a, cf. 132a).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, ii.39. ²⁵ *Ibid.*, iii.23 (fo. 131a). ²⁶ *Ibid.* (fo. 131b).

²⁷ An example interesting for its use of the term *ordinatio* (Ir. *ordan*) is *Vita I. S. Fintani seu Munnu*, § 18 (ed. Heist, *Vitae*, p. 203); cf. also *Vita S. Albei*, § 34 (*ibid.*, p. 126).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 50 (*Vita S. Fursei*, § 30), 224 (*Vita S. Colmani de Land Elo*, § 52), 232 (*Vita S. Columbae Tire Dá Glas*, §§ 28–31). ²⁹ *Vita S. Lugidi seu Moluae*, c. 68. ³⁰ Adomnán, *VSC* iii.23 (fo. 133b).

When one considers the importance of the funeral for the display of loyalties and alliances, it is remarkable that not even then were laymen allowed to disturb the detachment of the monastery. Non-corporeal relics were regularly venerated;³¹ not so the body itself.

The Irish, then, like the Arians, did not have a custom of enshrining the earthly remains of dead holy men. Columbanus was only treated like other Irish founders of monasteries in having his burial within the monastic enclosure and without any special treatment of the grave. Neither in position nor in the form of burial was it to be separated from the graves of other monks. In the second book of Jonas' *Life of Columbanus*, there are no miracles associated with his grave, because the holy man was not intended to be the patron of anyone who sought his earthly remains, but only of his monks; and for them he exercised patronage in death as the founder of a way of life rather than as a worker of miracles.

In Jonas' title, 'The Life of the Holy and most Blessed Columbanus, Abbot and Confessor', *vita*, 'Life', is not a word for a biography. In the preface to his *Life of the Fathers*, Gregory of Tours reflected on why his title – already traditional – had 'Life' in the singular rather than lives, even though he was going to write about some twenty holy men.³² He explains it by saying that a life of holiness is alike whoever leads it. Not, perhaps a very plausible reason, but it points to the true explanation: by the life of a saint the hagiographer means his way of life rather than anything one might call a career. This is why the *vita* of a saint can be so static, so lacking in movement through time, as in Adomnán's *Life of Columba* or in its principal model, Gregory the Great's *Life of Benedict*. This is even true for the thoroughly secular and classically inspired *Life of Charlemagne* by Einhard. Antiquity, therefore, had bequeathed the notion of a Life as a static character-sketch, and the hagiographer made, from this source, his own picture of the way of life, the *conversatio*, of the holy man.³³

A way of life, however, unlike an individual character or career, can be bequeathed to successors. Jonas, therefore, could, without paradox, write a *Vita Columbani* which recounted, for half of the work, the manner of life of the saint's disciples, when Columbanus himself was already in the sleep of death. A Life, thus understood, had as direct an application

³¹ *Ibid.*, ii.45. ³² *Vita Patrum*, Praef., ed. Krusch, pp. 212–13.

³³ See J. Fontaine's introduction to his edition of Sulpicius Severus' *Vita S. Martini*, *Sulpice Sévère, Vie de Saint Martin*, 3 vols., SC 133–5 (Paris, 1967–9), 1.59–71; C. Mohrmann's general introduction to *Vita di Antonio*, ed. G. J. M. Bartelink, *Vite dei Santi* (Verona, 1974), vii–lxvii.

for the monasteries that looked to the saint as did even a Rule written by that saint himself. Indeed, the two were sometimes considered to be a single entity: so, for example, the title of the early sixth-century Life of the Jura Fathers is 'The Life and Rule of the Holy Fathers . . .'³⁴ Jonas' Life was not a disinterested account of past events, a story already closed; it was directly relevant to the time at which it was written, the early 640s.

Jonas entered Bobbio perhaps as early as 617, certainly no later than 618, and thus only a short time after Columbanus' death.³⁵ He acted as personal assistant to Athala, the saint's successor as abbot of Bobbio, and also, after Athala's death, to the next abbot, Bertulf. He thus accompanied Bertulf to Rome in 628 when Pope Honorius granted a special exemption from episcopal authority to Bobbio. He had met Eustasius, abbot of Luxeuil, before the latter's death in 629. Before Bertulf's death in 639 Jonas had promised him that he would write a Life of Columbanus. By that time, however, he was heavily committed as an assistant to St Amand in his mission to the Franks of the north, and he did not complete the task until 642. Jonas, therefore, was in an exceptionally good position to ascertain the facts of Columbanus' life from his principal disciples. Nevertheless, the condition of Columbanus' monasteries had changed since the saint's death in 615. By 642 the violent political events of the last years of the saint's life had long been unambiguous in their message: the descendants of Brunhild, who, so it was claimed, had arranged the murder of twelve Frankish kings, had been driven from power, and all destroyed by the judgement of God, with the single exception of one of Theuderic II's sons, Merovech, the godson of the victorious king, Chlothar II.³⁶ Merovech, however, although he escaped death, lost any hope of royal power.³⁷

Although there was no doubt about the meaning of the events of

³⁴ *Vie des Pères du Jura*, ed. F. Martine, SC 142 (Paris, 1968), p. 236.

³⁵ For Jonas' career, see Krusch's introduction to the Life; for the date of his entry into the monastery of Bobbio, see n. 9 above; note that Susa, Jonas' home, was under Frankish rule, Fredegar, *Chronica*, iv.45.

³⁶ Fredegar, *Chronica*, iv.42; compare the parallel accusation against Fredegund in Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* vii.7.

³⁷ He may have ended his days as a monk at Bobbio, where a Meroveus is attested (Meroveus = Merovech): Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, ii.25; Fredegar, *Chronica*, iv.42; see the edition by A. Kusternig, in A. Kusternig and H. Haupt (eds.), *Quellen zur Geschichte des 7. und 8. Jahrhunderts*, Darmstadt, 1982, p. 200 n. 23). This is not unlikely since certain names became attached to the Merovingian dynasty and Merovech was, of course, one of them; furthermore, Bobbio, in a Lombard kingdom still tributary to the Franks, would have been an attractive place to put such a person; cf. Chlodovald in Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* iii.18.

612–13, when both the grandsons of Brunhild, Theudebert and Theuderic, had died and their grandmother had been executed in a peculiarly barbarous and shameful fashion, those years cast a long shadow across Jonas' perception of Columbanus' career. For nearly all his time in Francia the saint had lived within the kingdom of Burgundy, ruled successively by Guntram (up to 593), by Childebert II, the son of Sigibert I and Brunhild (593–6), and by Theuderic II, Childebert's younger son (596–612). During that period Columbanus founded three monasteries, Annegray, Luxeuil and Fontaine, all on the southern slopes of the Vosges.³⁸ Jonas does not explain, however, what royal or aristocratic patronage lay behind these foundations. Annegray, the first, may well have been established when Guntram was still king. By Jonas' time, however, Luxeuil was much the most important of the three; moreover Jonas' *Life* was addressed to Waldebert, abbot of Luxeuil, and Bobolenus, abbot of Bobbio. Jonas is likely, therefore, to have thought primarily of Luxeuil; the precise date and context of the earlier foundation of Annegray were of less importance and may even have been largely forgotten. Yet the account of the foundation of Luxeuil also fails to mention any royal grant or even consent. To this we may add two other curious features of the *Life*: first, Jonas places Columbanus' arrival in Francia in the reign of Sigibert I who died in 575;³⁹ secondly, more than half of the first book of the *Vita* is concerned with the events of the last five or six years of Columbanus' life, with his expulsion from Burgundy, the wars of the kings, Theuderic, Theudebert and Chlothar, the saint's journey via Bregenz to Italy and his death not long after the foundation of Bobbio. The reference to Sigibert is, provided Letter II in the collection of Columbanus' Letters is correctly assigned to 603, manifestly wrong:⁴⁰ in the letter the saint says that he and his brethren have been allowed to live for twelve years in Gaul. Columbanus did not, therefore, settle in Burgundy until about sixteen years after Sigibert's death; moreover, Sigibert ruled over Austrasia rather than Burgundy.

³⁸ Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, i.6, 10.

³⁹ One branch of the MSS (Krusch's A3) has Childebert in place of Sigibert; this, however, was a correction rather than the preservation of the original.

⁴⁰ Everything depends on the date of the consecration of Aridius, bishop of Lyons, mentioned in the letter (end of § 5). This seems fairly certainly to have been in 603; see Krusch's introduction to his edn of Jonas, p. 11. (Gregory the Great's *Registrum*, xiii.8, is a letter of November 602 to Aridius's predecessor but one, Aetherius, who is said by Fredegar to have died in 602, *Chronica*, iv.22; Fredegar there says that Aetherius was succeeded by Secundinus, but in iv.24 he has Aridius presiding over the Council of Chalon which, in 603, deposed and exiled Desiderius.)

There are two reasons which, together, explain these odd features of the Life; but, first, a false explanation needs to be excluded. It has been argued that the reason for the imbalance in the Life, whereby more than half the space is given to the last five or six years is that the sources for that period were relatively rich, while those for the saint's Irish years and the first eighteen years in Burgundy were scanty.⁴¹ Yet the Irish origins of Columbanus are described with some precision, implying that Jonas had a good informant. What is surprisingly vague is the account of the years in Burgundy before Columbanus was expelled. Even there Jonas has plenty of miracle stories to tell: it is not the quantity of available narrative, but rather the nature of what he chooses to tell which establishes a sharp contrast with the period 610–15.⁴² The first thing to notice about the second half of Book I is that it has a clear moral message which accords perfectly with the development of political events. As in the Chronicle of Fredegar, all evil is at the instigation of Brunhild; yet those who most immediately suffered punishment for her sins were her descendants (see fig. 8.1).

What happened in 613 was that a branch of the Merovingian dynasty was destroyed: Chlothar II, son of Chilperic and Fredegund, succeeded in removing from power, and in some cases from life, the great-grandchildren of Chilperic's brother Sigibert I and his Visigothic queen, Brunhild. The great-grandchildren, another Sigibert, Childebert and Corbus, as well as Merovech, Chlothar's godson, were guiltless, except for one thing: they were the lineal descendants of Brunhild.⁴³ She, however, was an alien, and so, apart from her descendants, without kindred in Francia. Once she was made a scapegoat for all the killings of Frankish kings and Burgundian magnates, she could be executed in a cruel drama which finally laid to rest the family feud of the descendants of Clovis.

The onslaught upon the reputation of Brunhild made by Jonas and the Burgundian chronicler, Fredegar, was the historiographical counterpart of that brutal ritual by which the old queen – who must have been close to seventy at the time – was tied by her hair, one arm and one leg to the tail of a wild horse, and so done to death. As the queen's body was broken by the horse, so her reputation was demolished by hagiographer

⁴¹ Krusch in his edn of Jonas, p. 51.

⁴² Named informants in Jonas' Life are Sonichar in i.11, Gallus, also in i.11, and Theudegisil in i.15. Gallus could have given Jonas valuable information about Columbanus' Irish years.

⁴³ Fredegar, *Chronica*, iv.42.

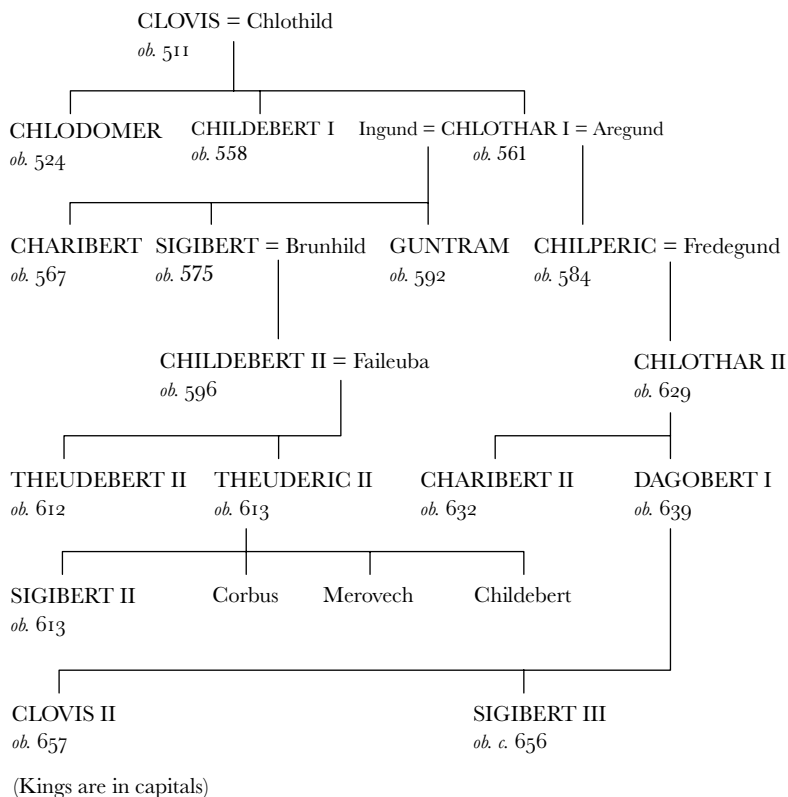


Fig. 8.1. The Merovingian kings

and historian.⁴⁴ In this sad business the hagiographer led the way and the historian followed.⁴⁵ The extent to which it was necessary to go is well illustrated by the chapter in which Fredegar introduced Brunhild into his *Chronicle*.⁴⁶ He there praises the Austrasian mayor of the palace, Gogo, saying that he was fortunate in his office until he went to Spain to bring back Brunhild as Sigibert's bride. For this good office,

⁴⁴ Sisebut, *Vita uel Passio Desiderii*, c. 4; ed. B. Krusch, MGH SRM iii. (Hanover, 1896), p. 631; *Passio S. Desiderii*, c. 2, *ibid.*, pp. 638–9; J. Fontaine, 'King Sisebut's *Vita Desiderii* and the Political Function of Visigothic Hagiography', in E. James (ed.), *Visigothic Spain: New Approaches* (Oxford, 1980), pp. 93–129. Fredegar, *Chronica*, iv.36, uses Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, i.18–19; according to Wood, the account of Desiderius to which Jonas refers (i.27, ed. Krusch, p. 214) was the anonymous *Passio*, not Sisebut's *Vita*, as claimed by Krusch: Wood, 'The Vita Columbani', 70–1.

⁴⁵ Fredegar, *Chronica*, iv.36, copying Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, i.18–20.

⁴⁶ Fredegar, *Chronica*, iii.59.

adds Fredegar, Brunhild rewarded him by continuously denouncing him to Sigibert until eventually Sigibert ordered him to be killed. From Gregory of Tours, however, we know that this was untrue. Gogo long outlived Sigibert and seems to have died in his bed.⁴⁷ He was not among the queen's particular enemies.⁴⁸ For Chlothar II, however, the political imperative was a double one: to pin the blame for as much bad blood as possible on the queen and to legitimise the removal of her descendants from life and kingship. It is apparent from the chronology of Columbanus' life in Gaul and from the situation of his monasteries in northern Burgundy that, for almost the entire period, he lived under the protection of those descendants, first Childebert II, her son, and then her grandson Theuderic II. What, therefore, Jonas did was to place Columbanus' welcome in Gaul in the reign of Childebert's father, Sigibert I. It might be thought that he, as the husband of Brunhild, would have been politically unacceptable as the patron of the holy man, but what seems to have mattered was simply descent from the Visigothic queen.⁴⁹ Fredegar's chronicle shows no particular bias once it has got back to the generation of Sigibert I and Chilperic (Chlothar II's father) except when it is talking about Brunhild herself.⁵⁰ Guntram, Sigibert's brother, who may well have been the king who first received Columbanus, was irrelevant to this particular political issue, and his name seems not to have occurred to Jonas, perhaps because, although Annegrav may have been founded under Guntram, Luxeuil was founded under Childebert. Sigibert is in Jonas' Life merely a politically acceptable alias for Brunhild's son, Childebert II, who was ruling both Austrasia and Burgundy at the probable date of Luxeuil's foundation.⁵¹

The exclusion of Childebert II, and of his son Theuderic II until he quarrelled with Columbanus, also allowed Jonas to give a strongly monastic orientation to the Life. Once Columbanus had settled in Burgundy, Jonas concentrated on the internal affairs of the three communities. When he did mention aristocratic support, as in the chapter on the foundation of Luxeuil, it was interpreted as a consequence of the high reputation of the monastery, not a precondition.⁵² What was

⁴⁷ Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* vi.1, where there is no suggestion of violence or foul play.

⁴⁸ Her principal Austrasian enemies seem to have been Ursio and Guntram Boso: Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* vi.4, ix.8–10.

⁴⁹ Note Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, i.18: Childebert II succeeds, 'annuente matre Brunichilde'; after his death Theudebert and Theuderic rule 'cum avia Brunichilde'.

⁵⁰ Fredegar, *Chronica*, iii.61, keeps Gregory of Tours' reference to Sigibert's *prudencia*; and, in iii.90, he, like Gregory, criticises Chilperic for entering into Paris contrary to the agreement made with his brothers. ⁵¹ As suggested to me by Ian Wood. ⁵² *Vita S. Columbani*, i.10.

significant in Jonas' picture was the relationship of the abbot, 'the man of God', to his monks, not the relationship of the monasteries to the outside world – except that the latter was virtually excluded. The contents of chapters 7–17 are (with the single exception of chapter 10 on the foundation of Luxeuil) a series of miracle stories. When they are examined, it soon becomes clear that they concern the internal life of Columbanus' monasteries. The principal theme is the supply of food: the holiness of the founder is demonstrated by his ability to call upon divine aid to see that his monks do not starve. The monastic life portrayed is far removed from aristocratic *otium* in a religious guise; indeed, Jonas' portrait is of a desperate fight for bare survival.

Outsiders appear at three points. In chapter 7, in the early days of the first monastery, Annegray, an unnamed layman provided food and received a gift of healing for his wife; in addition, a neighbouring abbot, Carantocus (who, from his name, would appear to be a Breton) also supplied food. In chapter 14 Jonas introduced the only person of high secular rank, a Burgundian magnate named Waldelenus, who secured Columbanus' prayers that his wife, Flavia, would bear a child, on the condition that it was consecrated to Christ.⁵³ The child was named Donatus, 'he who has been given', by Columbanus when he baptised him. The saint thus established baptismal kinship not only with Donatus but with his parents: he was their 'co-father', *compater*.⁵⁴ The child was educated at Luxeuil, and both he and his parents became strong supporters of Columbanian monasticism.⁵⁵ In chapters 15 and 17 a local priest appears, called Winioc, the father of Bobilenus, abbot of Bobbio, to whom, together with Waldebert, the letter prefixed to the *Life* is addressed. The only outsiders to be named, therefore, were either a neighbouring abbot or themselves closely tied to Columbanus.

If the first half of Book I is concerned strictly with the monastery, the second turns abruptly to the relationship between the monastery and the world, in particular the world of high politics. It is as if Columbanus were uncontroversial until the last few years of his life. The letters show that this impression is untrue, and it therefore becomes important to determine why Jonas put forward a misleading account of the relationship between Columbanus and the Frankish and Burgundian court and bishops.⁵⁶ Jonas, like Fredegar, seems to reveal a preference for two of

⁵³ See *PLRE* iii.486 (Flavia), 1399 (Waldelenus); also 309, their other son, Chramnelenus.

⁵⁴ J. H. Lynch, *Godparents and Kinship in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton, NJ, 1986), pp. 192–201.

⁵⁵ Prinz, *Frühes Mönchtum*, pp. 149–50.

⁵⁶ Esp. *Epp.* i–iii (ed. Walker, *S. Columbanii Opera*, pp. 2–24).

the Frankish *regna*, Austrasia and Burgundy, as against the third, Neustria.⁵⁷ This attitude may have arisen from the high position acquired by Jonas' friend Bishop Amand in Austrasia in the 640s and from the position of Luxeuil itself in Burgundy.⁵⁸ Quite the opposite attitude, however, was adopted by Columbanus, according to Jonas, in the years 610–12. His story turns on the sexual mores of Theuderic and the evil counsel of Brunhild. We are told that Theuderic frequently visited Columbanus to seek his prayers, was rebuked for having concubines rather than a lawful wife, and that he promised to change his ways.⁵⁹ Brunhild, however, 'being a second Jezebel', was tempted by the Devil to oppose the holy man's counsel, for she was afraid that, if Theuderic married, she would lose her power in the royal court to the new queen.⁶⁰ Columbanus is then said to have visited Brunhild at a royal estate called 'Brocaricum uilla'.⁶¹ She had with her Theuderic's children by his concubines, and she asked Columbanus to bless them. To this request he replied: 'You ought to know that they will not receive the royal sceptres, because they have been born to whores.' After this, relations between court and holy man were impossible to repair: even though Theuderic again promised to mend his ways Brunhild turned the minds of the nobles and the men of the royal household against the saint; she even went on to persuade the bishops to take a stand against his form of worship and the monastic rule he had given to his monks. The crisis came when Theuderic, driven on by the men of his court – themselves egged on by Brunhild – went to Luxeuil to confront Columbanus. The king complained about two things: first, that Columbanus refused to conform to the customs of the churches within his province, and, secondly, that he refused access into 'the inner precinct' to ordinary Christians.⁶²

Jonas' story is carefully constructed: the root of the trouble is Brunhild, inspired by the Devil and insistent upon retaining power in the

⁵⁷ Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, i.6 (ed. Krusch, p. 162, lines 16–18).

⁵⁸ Also perhaps from Bertulf's kinship with Arnulf, bishop of Metz, who was one of the Austrasian magnates to support Chlothar II in 613; Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, ii.23; Fredegar, *Chronica*, iv.40. ⁵⁹ Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, i.18.

⁶⁰ On the use of the Old Testament Jezebel as a weapon against royal women, see J. Nelson, 'Queens as Jezebels: The Careers of Brunhild and Balthild', in D. Baker (ed.), *Medieval Women: Essays Presented to Rosalind Hill*, Studies in Church History, Subsidia, i (1978), pp. 31–77.

⁶¹ Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, i.19; Brocaricum is usually identified with Bruyères-le-Châtel to the east of Paris, but this has been questioned: Bullough, 'The Career of Columbanus', p. 15 n. 48.

⁶² The province may be Burgundy as a whole: although Luxeuil lay within the small ecclesiastical province of Besançon, Burgundian councils were normally headed by the bishop of Lyons and included the bishops of Besançon and their co-provincials.

court. The final conflict, however, turns on issues only lightly sketched, but certainly having nothing to do with Theuderic's sexual predilections or the rights of succession enjoyed by his sons. When Jonas points to Columbanus' *religio*, 'form of worship', and to his divergence from the customs of the province, 'comprovinciales mores', he is probably making an oblique reference to the Easter question.⁶³ When he cites, as a further issue, the question of access to the 'septa secretiora', the inner precincts, the complaint foreshadows passages in the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*.⁶⁴ This suggests that, on this point, Jonas is telling the truth. If by *religio*, 'form of worship', and the customs that diverged from those of the province, we may understand Jonas to be referring to the Easter controversy, then Columbanus' own letters provide ample confirmation. The crucial testimony is provided by Letter iv,⁶⁵ which was written from Nantes in 610, to judge by Jonas' narrative, as Columbanus was on the point of being put aboard a ship which would take him back to Ireland. This letter is one of the most moving documents of early medieval history: in its emotional directness it recalls Patrick's *Confessio*; it conveys with great intensity the anxieties of an abbot torn from his monks, unable to guide his flock away from the wolves he sees circling round it. The letter accords with Jonas' general outlook in that it places first the internal cohesion of the community, secured by fraternal charity, patience in the face of affliction and obedience to the superior. This, however, is threatened:

but the dangers I mean are the dangers of disagreement; for I fear lest there too there be disagreement on account of Easter, lest perhaps, through the Devil's tricks, they wish to divide you, if you do not keep peace with them; for now, without me, you seem to stand less firmly there.

The enemies of the community, therefore, were using the Easter question not only as a weapon against Columbanus, but also as a means to break the cohesion of his community – a tactic unforgivable in monastic eyes.

The enemies of the community were not, however, the only threat, or even the greatest. Addressing his chosen successor Athala, the Burgundian noble who was to be abbot of Bobbio, Columbanus declares:

⁶³ Jonas, *Vita S. Columbanii*, i.19 (ed. Krusch, p. 190, lines 1 and 7).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, lines 8–9; *Hib.* xvii.4; xlv.5–7; for the precinct, see Doherty, 'The Monastic Town in Early Ireland', pp. 55–63.

⁶⁵ Ed. G. S. M. Walker, *Sancti Columbanii Opera*, pp. 26–36 (note esp. § 8); Jonas, *Vita S. Columbanii*, i.22–3.

But there are troubles on every side, my dearest friend: there is danger if they hate, and danger if they love. You must know that both are real, either hatred or love from their side; peace perishes in hatred, and integrity in love.

The impression given is that attitudes to Columbanus were polarised: enthusiastic supporters threatened the seclusion of the monastic life just as enemies threatened to divide the community.

Jonas, therefore, is not especially misleading on the final grounds of the rupture between Theuderic and Columbanus. True, he never explicitly mentions the Easter controversy; moreover he implies that it only arose as a result of the machinations of Brunhild. A careful reticence was only to be expected, since the communities of Bobbio and Luxeuil had abandoned the Celtic Easter before Jonas wrote. To attribute the disagreements to Brunhild was to make her as effective a scapegoat for ecclesiastical disputes as she was for the feuds of the Merovingians. The letters, however, show that the paschal dispute was at least a decade old when Theuderic expelled Columbanus from Burgundy; the expulsion presupposes that royal support had now been withdrawn, but the trouble cannot have been started with recent political manoeuvrings by Brunhild.⁶⁶

Jonas refers to Theuderic's repentance for his sexual sins only in general terms.⁶⁷ From Fredegar, however, we can see the particular story behind the general statement; and we can also make an assessment of the part supposed to have been played by Brunhild. In 606/7 Theuderic sent an embassy headed by Aridius, bishop of Lyons, to Witteric, king of the Visigoths, to ask for the hand of Ermenberg his daughter.⁶⁸ The mission was successful and the Visigothic princess was brought back to Francia and presented to Theuderic at Chalon-sur-Saône. Theuderic is said by Fredegar to have been delighted at receiving his bride. He was, however, converted from love to hate by Brunhild and his sister Theudilana. The marriage was never consummated; the bride was despatched back to Spain without her dowry, and Theuderic was left to the consolation of his concubines.

The role in this affair assigned by Fredegar to Brunhild is not plausible.⁶⁹ She was herself of Visigothic origin, and the Austrasian letters

⁶⁶ *Ep.* i, written to Gregory the Great between 595 and 603, shows that Columbanus had already been in touch with Rome (§§ 9 and 12); *Ep.* iii.2 shows that Columbanus wrote at least two letters to Gregory which were apparently not received in Rome. ⁶⁷ *Vita S. Columbani*, i.18.

⁶⁸ Fredegar, *Chronica*, iv.30.

⁶⁹ G. Kurth, 'Le reine Brunehaut', in his *Études franques* (Paris-Brussels, 1919), i.320-3. It is, however, accepted by Nelson, 'Queens and Jezebels', 58.

demonstrate that it was her concern for good relations between Franks and Visigoths which lay behind the marriage of her daughter Ingund to Hermenigild, son of the Visigothic king Leuvigild.⁷⁰ It also caused serious friction between herself and Guntram, king of Burgundy from 561 to 593, who was, of all the Frankish kings of his day, the only one to be opposed to a Visigothic alliance.⁷¹ Furthermore, the leader of the embassy to secure the marriage of Ermenburg to Theuderic was Aridius, bishop of Lyons, claimed by Fredegar to have been an ally of Brunhild.⁷² Finally, Brunhild was hardly likely to be behind the brutal rejection of Ermenburg when that recalled the treatment of her own sister Galswinth by her mortal enemy Chilperic.⁷³ It is far more likely that, as in other failed high-status marriages among the Merovingians, such as those of Chilperic to Galswinth and Theudebert to Wisigard, the trouble stemmed from the prior attachment of the bridegroom to other women.⁷⁴

Yet there are grounds for hesitating before rejecting outright the story of the refusal of Columbanus to bless Theuderic's sons. Moreover the issue is closely related to questions about the role of the early Irish Church in royal inauguration, which are wider than the problem of Columbanus' supposed refusal to bless Theuderic's children. First, the story is closely reminiscent, in reverse, of one told by Cumméne the Fair, abbot of Iona (657–69), about Columba, the founder of Durrow, Derry and Iona.⁷⁵ According to Cumméne, Columba was compelled by an angelic vision, in which he was severely chastised, to ordain Áedán mac Gabráin as king of Dál Riata. The ordination consisted of a blessing with imposition of hands on the head of the king; and it was accompanied by a prophecy about the fates of Áedán's sons. Similarly, when, according to Jonas, Columbanus refused to bless the sons of Theuderic, he uttered a prophecy about their fate.

The blessing as a form of royal inauguration, like the rite of anointing, was taken from the Old Testament. The fullest comparison is with the story of Esau and Jacob. Esau wedded Hittite women, 'which were

⁷⁰ *Epistolae Austrasicae*, ed. W. Gundlach in E. Dümmler (ed.), MGH, *Epistolae Merowingici et Karolini Aevi*, i (1892), nos. xxvi, xxvii, xxix, xlv. ⁷¹ Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* ix.16, 20.

⁷² Fredegar, *Chronica*, iv.30; according to Fredegar, *ibid.*, iv.24, the deposition and exile of Desiderius was 'at the instigation of Brunhild and Aridius'; similarly Desiderius' murder in iv.32 is due to the plotting of Aridius and Brunhild. Aridius' role is not attested in the anonymous *Passio Desiderii* or in Sisebut's *Vita*.

⁷³ Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* iv.28; Venantius Fortunatus, *Opera Poetica*, ed. F. Leo, MGH AA 4/1 (Berlin, 1881), vi.5. ⁷⁴ Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* iii.27.

⁷⁵ Preserved in the Schaffhausen MS of Adomnán's *Vita S. Columbae*, iii.5; cf. M. Meckler, 'Colum Cille's Ordination of Áedán mac Gabráin', *Innes Review*, 41 (1990), 139–50.

a grief of mind unto Isaac and to Rebekah'.⁷⁶ When the father Isaac grew old and blind, he intended to bless his eldest son, Esau, but by the cunning of Rebekah he was induced to bless Jacob instead. This blessing was a political act, the designation of a successor: 'Let people serve thee, and nations bow down before thee: be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee.'⁷⁷ To understand the Irish use of the Old Testament blessing, we need to distinguish between the designation of an heir (who will normally succeed some time later) and the inauguration of a king (who thereby succeeds straight away). What the story of Columba and Áedán mac Gabráin shows is the transference of the role of blesser from the father designating an heir to the holy man – counterpart in the new dispensation of the prophet in the old – conferring divine legitimacy on a king's rule at its inauguration. In a separate act Columba then went on to prophesy the succession to Áedán. The Old Testament blessing designates the successor and so determines the future: the father, who does the blessing, does not thereby resign his authority, but only determines who will succeed to it. Columba in blessing Áedán mac Gabráin declared that God approved the succession which was occurring there and then. The prophecy of future events – the succession to, not of, Áedán – was now an inessential adjunct to the act of benediction.

Jonas' story of Columbanus, Brunhild and the sons of Theuderic stands halfway between the Old Testament model and Cumméne the Fair's account of Columba blessing Áedán mac Gabráin. Columbanus refused to bless Theuderic's sons and, when Theuderic was still alive, prophesied that they would never succeed. The blessing has been transferred from the father blessing his son to the holy man blessing someone outside his kindred; but it is not yet part of a royal inauguration, for it occurs during the reign of the previous king. As in the story of Isaac, Esau and Jacob, therefore, the blessing (or its refusal) is intrinsically tied to the prophecy of future events. Jonas' story fits perfectly into the Irish development of blessing as a form of royal inauguration (*ordinatio*), for it provides a link between the Old Testament model and Cumméne the Fair's story of the inauguration of Áedán mac Gabráin.

Although dynastic prophecy was therefore known in the Gaul of Gregory of Tours,⁷⁸ the particular feature found in Jonas is the conjunction of a blessing after the Old Testament pattern with prophecy.

⁷⁶ Gen. 26:35.

⁷⁷ Gen. 27:29.

⁷⁸ Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* v.14: Gregory on Chilperic.

According to Jonas, moreover, Columbanus refused his blessing because Theuderic's sons were the children of concubines rather than a lawful wife. This approach recalls one of Gregory's brusquer dismissals of his episcopal colleagues:

[Sagittarius, bishop of Gap,] began to spread silly tales about the king, saying, for example, that Guntram's sons would never succeed to the throne because, when their mother married him, she had been one of Magnachar's slaves. Sagittarius was overlooking the fact that, irrespective of their mother's birth, all children born to a king count as that king's sons.⁷⁹

What mattered for the Merovingians, as several incidents in Gregory's narrative demonstrate, was paternity and not the status of the mother. Even the 'fatuous and empty-headed' Sagittarius, however, did not go so far as Jonas' Columbanus. Sagittarius was not concerned with the nature of the union between a child's parents, but only with the status of the mother. The Austrasian view, expressed in the aftermath of the marriage between Sigibert and Brunhild, was that, while an acknowledged son of a Merovingian king had a valid claim to a share of the kingdom, kings demeaned themselves by unions with slave-women.⁸⁰ Columbanus, however, was said to have refused to bless Theuderic's sons because they were born of unlawful unions with whores. Social status was not his concern, only morals.

To some extent this agrees with what we know of Columbanus from his own writings. Jonas declared that the Irish *peregrinus* brought to Gaul 'the medicines of penance'. We have what appears to be his file of penitential texts, partly, it seems, written by himself.⁸¹ Moreover, in a letter to Gregory the Great, he says that bishops have sought his direction as a spiritual guide.⁸² Columbanus cited Gildas as an authority, and Gildas had few equals in the business of denouncing kings; moreover, he did it openly, not by oblique references to angelic visions.⁸³ Gregory of Tours did a professional job of demolishing the reputation of Chilperic, 'the Nero and Herod of our times' – when he was dead.⁸⁴ Gildas rebuked living kings. There is no difficulty whatever, therefore, in believing that Columbanus rebuked Theuderic to his face. Yet it is quite another matter to say that Columbanus put himself into the position of Samuel declaring that Saul had forfeited divine favour as king and that

⁷⁹ Ibid., v.20, tr. L. Thorpe, *Gregory of Tours: The History of the Franks*, Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth, 1974), p. 286. ⁸⁰ Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* iv.27.

⁸¹ Charles-Edwards, 'The Penitential of Columbanus', esp. pp. 235–6. ⁸² *Ep.* i. 6.

⁸³ Gildas, *De Excidio Britanniae*, cc. 27–36 (ed. and tr. M. Winterbottom, *Gildas: The Ruin of Britain and Other Documents* [London, 1978], pp. 99–105). ⁸⁴ Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* vi.46.

his sons would never be kings.⁸⁵ He may well have said that Theuderic himself risked incurring God's anger because of sexual sin, but he is most unlikely to have said that sleeping with concubines would result in the children born of such unions not succeeding to the kingship. Any Irish background will not help. The moral habits of Irish kings were certainly not exemplary; yet the acknowledged sons of unions between kings and freewomen were not excluded from the succession because of any moral defect in those unions. If the Irish had qualms about the sexual partners of kings, they were likely to agree with the fatuous Sagittarius and not with Jonas' Columbanus. Social status was their concern, not morals.⁸⁶

The likelihood is, therefore, that Jonas' Life contains a history of Columbanus' relations with Theuderic reworked in order to legitimise the *coup d'état* by which Chlothar II acquired the kingship over all the Frankish *regna*. This is not to say that Jonas was solely responsible for the new version of events. Luxeuil had made its peace with Chlothar. Jonas' final story about Columbanus concerns Chlothar's sending of Eustasius to ask the holy man to return to Luxeuil. Although he refused to return, he also commanded Eustasius to seek the patronage of the king. Moreover, Columbanus' refusal to bless Theuderic's sons was not the only example of political invective in the service of Chlothar's regime. The expulsion of Desiderius, bishop of Vienne, through a wicked alliance between Aridius, bishop of Lyons, and Brunhild, who jointly induced Theuderic to exile a saint, was another useful story; it became even better when it was added that Aridius and Brunhild induced Theuderic to have Desiderius stoned to death – 'for this evil deed the kingdom of Theuderic and his sons was destroyed'.⁸⁷ Yet on a moral level, Chlothar II's propaganda had its weak points. In 606 Theuderic had had a son, Merovech, to whom Chlothar II had stood as godfather.⁸⁸ This ceremony made Chlothar Theuderic's 'co-father'. Moreover, Chlothar himself had been saved from loss of his royal inheritance and probable death as an infant when his royal uncle Guntram became his godfather.⁸⁹ Yet, unlike Guntram, Chlothar did not secure Merovech's succession after Theuderic's death in 612. The real Columbanus may have been well aware of these complexities.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ 1 Sam. 15:10–23. ⁸⁶ *EIWK*, p. 316.

⁸⁷ Fredegar, *Chronica*, iv.32; cf. iv.24; Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, i.27. The detail about stoning is intended to suggest the parallel of the proto-martyr Stephen. ⁸⁸ Fredegar, *Chronica*, iv.24, 42.

⁸⁹ Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* x.28.

⁹⁰ Especially if the Meroveus, monk of Bobbio, in Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, ii.25, was this Merovech: see n. 37 above.

A more probable context for the evolution of the story of Columbanus and Theuderic's sons is later, in 626/7. Eustasius then found himself compelled to defend the Rule and reputation of Columbanus against a formidable alliance between a dissident disciple, Agrestius, his kinsman Abelenus, bishop of Geneva, and Warnachar, mayor of the Burgundian palace.⁹¹ This crisis demonstrated the need for royal support. The timely death of Warnachar just before the Synod of Mâcon, which had been called to judge the case brought by Agrestius, saved the day for Luxeuil.

There is a reasonably good case for perceiving the Synod of Mâcon as a major turning-point in the history of Columbanian monasticism. One of the issues which Jonas admits were at stake was the tonsure. As before, he makes no unambiguous reference to the paschal question. It is perhaps reasonable to infer the one from the other.⁹² That the Celtic Easter was still an issue may also be deduced from the timing of a papal initiative to convert the Irish to the paschal reckoning of Victorius of Aquitaine (the one followed in Gaul). The sequence of events seems to have been as follows:

- (i) Athala, a Burgundian noble and Columba's successor as abbot of Bobbio, died on 10 March, probably in 626.
- (ii) The Synod of Mâcon was held under the presidency of Treticus, bishop of Lyons, in 626/7. Eustasius was there accused by Agrestius of, among other things, using a form of tonsure contrary to custom. In spite of the death, just before the synod, of Warnachar, mayor of the Burgundian palace and the principal lay supporter of Agrestius, the result was an episcopally brokered reconciliation between Eustasius and Agrestius, not a triumph for Eustasius. Agrestius was subsequently, however, to destroy his own influence.
- (iii) Agrestius had earlier joined the Aquileian schism, which was dominant in the Po valley and round the top of the Adriatic into Dalmatia.⁹³ The Aquileians stood out against papal support for Justinian's condemnation of 'the Three Chapters'. The Synod of Mâcon, together with Agrestius' anti-papal stance, may have encouraged Bertulf, now abbot of Bobbio, to journey to Rome, accompanied by Jonas, to seek papal support.⁹⁴ One result was Honorius I's privilege of May 628 in favour of Bobbio, freeing it from episcopal control. This was, however, conjoined by Honorius

⁹¹ Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, ii.9. ⁹² As does Krusch in his edn of the *Vita S. Columbani*, p. 38.

⁹³ The *Aquilegensis* of *Vita S. Columbani*, ii.9.

⁹⁴ The immediate pressure on Bertulf was to find a means of dealing with Probus, the bishop of Tortona: Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, ii.23.

with the imposition of a special task upon Bobbio, namely to champion the cause of orthodoxy against the Lombard Arians.⁹⁵

- (iv) Honorius also sent a letter to the Irish urging conformity with the paschal reckoning then current at Rome as well as in Gaul.⁹⁶ This cannot have been late in his pontificate because he had by then adopted the Alexandrian reckoning in place of that of Victorius of Aquitaine.⁹⁷ The most plausible context is 628 when Bertulf was in Rome. The issue of Irish irregularities was an urgent one because of Agrestius and the Synod of Mâcon. Some of the southern Irish churches conformed to the paschal reckoning of Victorius of Aquitaine after receiving this letter, but a synod failed to secure uniformity.
- (v) Irish legates were in Rome in 631, apparently in response to the papal initiative on the paschal question.⁹⁸ As a result the southern Irish churches adopted the paschal reckoning of Victorius *c.* 632.

The fortunes of Columbanian monasticism in Francia and Italy were thus intimately connected with the development of the Irish Church at home.

They were also intimately connected with developments elsewhere. Honorius was also the heir of Gregory the Great, both in his support for monasticism and in his concern for missionary work.⁹⁹ It was under Honorius that Birinus set out from Italy for England and Felix left Burgundy for East Anglia.¹⁰⁰ Birinus may have originally come from northern Italy, for he was consecrated by the anti-Aquileian, and thus pro-papal, bishop of Milan, Asterius. Asterius was obliged at the time to reside at Genoa, within the province of Liguria which was to remain in Byzantine hands until 643.¹⁰¹ Birinus therefore seems to have emerged from the pro-papal section of the north Italian church of which Bobbio was an important outpost in Lombard territory. Felix, bishop of the East Angles, is likely to have come from a Columbanian background.¹⁰²

⁹⁵ Ibid., ii.23; G. Bognetti, *L'età longobarda*, 4 vols. (Milan, 1966–8), ii.306–7.

⁹⁶ Bede, *HE* ii.19.

⁹⁷ See below, pp. 408–9.

⁹⁸ Cummian, *De Controversia Paschali*, 4–7.

⁹⁹ *Liber Pontificalis*, ed. L. Duchesne, *Le Liber Pontificalis: Texte, introduction et commentaire*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1886, 1892), i.312, no. 72 (tr. R. Davis, *The Book of Pontiffs (Liber Pontificalis)*, Liverpool, 1989, pp. 64–5); Bognetti, *L'età longobarda*, ii.300–7; P. Llewellyn, 'The Roman Church in the Seventh Century: The Legacy of Gregory I', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 25 (1974), 367, and also 372–4.

¹⁰⁰ Bede, *HE* ii.15; iii.7.

¹⁰¹ Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, ed. L. Bethmann and G. Waitz, MGH *Scriptores Rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum Saec. vi–ix* (Hanover, 1878), iv.45; Bognetti, *L'età longobarda*, ii.278, 314–7.

¹⁰² Bede, *HE* ii.15; Ewig, *Die Merowinger*, pp. 150–1; I. N. Wood, 'The Mission of Augustine of Canterbury', *Speculum*, 69 (1994), p. 8, suggests a connection between Felix and Syagrius, bishop of Autun, and the principal episcopal supporter among the Franks of the mission of Augustine.

Eustasius had already been active in missionary work among the Bavarians before the Synod of Mâcon.¹⁰³ Felix probably came to Kent and then East Anglia early in the 630s, after the Synod of Mâcon, by which time Columbanian monasticism was strongly in the ascendant; moreover he was to work with the Irish monk Fursa, an unsurprising collaboration if Felix had Columbanian connections.¹⁰⁴ The activities of Felix and Birinus were, in any case, northern extensions of a missionary activity associated both with Pope Honorius and with the court of Dagobert. It was precisely because of his work in north-eastern Francia with the Aquitanian Amand, the most eminent missionary of the middle of the seventh century, that Jonas did not complete his *Life of Columbanus* until 642.¹⁰⁵ This period of maximum influence of Columbanian monasticism was the context in which Jonas wrote.

If it be admitted as probable that Felix had a Columbanian background, we have a further indication of the extent to which the standing of Luxeuil had improved by the 630s. Felix went first to the pope's namesake, Honorius, metropolitan bishop of Canterbury. Yet about twenty years earlier, Laurence, Augustine's successor as metropolitan of Canterbury, had addressed a letter to the Irish Church in which he disclosed clear opposition to Columbanus:

When the apostolic see sent us, according to its custom, to preach to pagan peoples in these western lands, as in the whole world, we entered this island which is called Britain. Before we learnt the truth, we believed that the Britons and the Irish followed the custom of the universal Church, and so we held both in veneration. When we came to know the Britons, we believed the Irish to be superior. We learnt, however, from the Bishop Dagán when he came to this island, which I have mentioned, and from the abbot Columbanus in Gaul, that the Irish do not differ at all from the Britons in their way of life.¹⁰⁶

Laurence and his fellow-bishops, Mellitus and Iustus, were in close contact with Francia, and their letter can therefore be taken as a good guide to episcopal opinion in much of Gaul *c.* 610.¹⁰⁷

Agrestius, therefore, precipitated a severe crisis for Columbanian monasticism. In so doing he unintentionally enhanced its influence. Agrestius was both a supporter of the Aquileian schism – and therefore an opponent of papal authority – and also an opponent of both Athala

¹⁰³ Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, ii.8.

¹⁰⁴ Bede, *HE* iii.19; *HE* ii.15 and iii.20 suggest that Felix died *c.* 648 (assuming that his episcopate began shortly after Sigebert's accession in 630 or 631), while Fursa died in 649 (AU 649.5).

¹⁰⁵ Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, Praef.

¹⁰⁶ Bede, *HE* ii.4 (604 × 617, and probably before the death of Æthelberht in 616).

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Bede, *HE* ii.5, for these Frankish links.

and Eustasius. He used the Celtic tonsure, and very probably the Celtic Easter, still prevailing at Luxeuil, as a weapon against the whole Columbanian tradition. When Columbanus himself was attacked for his paschal observance, he responded by appealing to Gregory the Great.¹⁰⁸ Bertulf's journey to Rome in 628 – to the most Gregorian of all the popes of the early seventh century – echoed Columbanus' appeal to Gregory himself. There was, however, one vital difference: it is very likely that Luxeuil and Bobbio acted together in conforming to the paschal reckoning of Victorius as a direct consequence of the Synod of Mâcon. Agrestius attacked both, and Bertulf's Frankish background shows continuing close ties between the two monasteries.¹⁰⁹ Once that step had been taken, Agrestius' Aquileian sympathies and the missionary aims of Luxeuil and Bobbio made it easier for Bobbio to gain the support of Honorius.

The story of Columbanus and the sons of Theuderic was, therefore, probably developed after the saint's death in 615. Since the *Life of Columbanus* was addressed to a monastic readership with a notable aristocratic element and further aristocratic connections, the purpose of the story needs to be assessed in that light. A point of particular importance is that the friends of Luxeuil now included, by c. 640, several bishops. Jonas' narrative had to satisfy the requirements, first, of the monks of his own monasteries; secondly, of the aristocratic friends of Columbanus, Athala, Eustasius and their successors; and thirdly, of the bishops, now increasingly supportive in Francia, but still often divided from Bobbio by the Aquileian schism in Italy. In Francia, royal courts were sufficiently central to the careers of both lay nobles and bishops to compel attention even from a hagiographer concerned primarily with monks; among the Lombards, too, the connection between the royal capital at Pavia and Bobbio was crucial, in spite of the Arian allegiance of some kings and the Aquileian sympathies of others.¹¹⁰

Jonas' story of the conflict between Columbanus, Brunhild and Theuderic answered the requirements of these audiences perfectly. It satisfied the monks by associating opposition to Columbanus – such as

¹⁰⁸ Columbanus, *Ep.* i.

¹⁰⁹ Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, ii.23: 'Exin, adventante beato Atala ex Ausoniae partibus, cum voluntate et pacis vinculo venerabilis vir Eusthasii eius societate subiunctus est, quia erant cor unum et anima una, nec quicquam discordiae manebat, si mutuo ac vicissim subiectos sibi commutarent.' ('Then, on Athala's arrival from Italy, he [Bertulf] was joined to his fellowship with the agreement and retaining the bond of peace of Eustasius, because they [Athala and Eustasius] were one heart and one soul, and no trace of discord remained as long as they exchanged monks subject to them in both directions in turn.')

¹¹⁰ Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, ii.23, 24; Bognetti, *L'età longobarda*, ii.306–7, 317.

that voiced by Agrestius – with the discredited regime of that second Jezebel, Brunhild. Indeed, Agrestius performs in Book II of the *Vita S. Columbani* a role not unlike that of Brunhild in Book I. It satisfied the needs of the aristocratic friends of Columbanus and his successors by demonstrating that, in backing an outspoken, though holy, outsider, they had also backed a prophet who knew how the wheel of political fortune would turn. And, finally, it satisfied the bishops: apart from one or two hints, mainly directed at discredited figures of the past, any hostility shown by bishops towards Columbanus could be passed over in a silence as deep as that in which Jonas buried the paschal controversy.

Yet Columbanus was indeed expelled from Burgundy in 610. Moreover, his letters bear ample testimony to his difficulties with bishops and to the part played in those difficulties by the paschal dispute. If one is sceptical about Jonas' explanation for Columbanus' expulsion, it becomes necessary to find another. Any substitute theory is difficult to substantiate, precisely because the evidence of the Life appears to have been recast so as to point in another direction. Yet some useful points can be made on the basis of Columbanus' letters as well as the Life by Jonas. The first direct evidence of Columbanus' difficulties with the Burgundian bishops comes in Letter I, written to Pope Gregory the Great after 595, but probably not much later.¹¹¹ Luxeuil was, it seems likely, founded between 593 and 596 so that this letter comes from the early years of the foundation.¹¹² Letter II, addressed to the Burgundian bishops assembled in synod at Theuderic's principal residence, Chalon-sur-Saône, cannot be dated before 603, since Aridius was already bishop of Lyons (and thus the metropolitan who, we may assume, presided over the council).¹¹³ Letter III, again to a pope, is most plausibly dated to 606–7.¹¹⁴ In these letters the paschal issue remains unresolved.¹¹⁵ The same is true for Letter IV, written in 610 when Columbanus was officially being put on a boat sailing from Nantes at the mouth of the Loire to Ireland. In that letter the paschal question was a threat to the

¹¹¹ *Opera S. Columbani*, ed. Walker, p. xxxvi.

¹¹² Assuming, first, that Jonas' Sigibert (*Vita S. Columbani*, i.6) stands for Childebert II, who did indeed rule over both Austrasia and Burgundy, as Jonas incorrectly says Sigibert did; secondly, that only the first foundation, of Annegray, could have been made in the reign of Guntram, who died 28 March 593 (Fredegar, *Chronica*, iv.14).

¹¹³ *Opera S. Columbani*, ed. Walker, pp. xxxvi–xxxvii.

¹¹⁴ P. Grosjean, 'La Controverse pascale chez les Celtes: 3. Dates des trois premières lettres de S. Coloman', *Analecta Bollandiana*, 64 (1946), 208–10.

¹¹⁵ It is necessary to remember that the Council of Orléans III (AD 541), c. 1, had, for the Franks, established Victorius' paschal reckoning but without resolving its hesitations between 'Greek' and 'Latin' dates (for these see below, pp. 392–3); for continuing dispute see Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* v.17 (on the Easter of 577).

Columbanian community; this was not because it had been settled against Columbanus, with the consequence that, with his expulsion, his disciples still resident in Burgundy were compelled to abandon the Celtic Easter; rather it was a threat because it could be used by enemies to divide the community. The paschal issue between Columbanus and the Burgundian bishops remained, therefore, unresolved from the time when the Irish *peregrinus* became a significant figure in Frankish Gaul in the middle of the 590s until his expulsion in 610. Indeed it remained unresolved, if the earlier argument about the Synod of Mâcon was correct, until 626/7, more than ten years after the holy man was in his Apennine grave.

So prolonged a dispute suggests that the bishops were not united against Columbanus, a conclusion confirmed by the readiness of some among their number to adopt him as spiritual director.¹¹⁶ Yet the attitude of Laurence of Canterbury and his fellow Gregorian missionaries, Mellitus and Justus, implies that the majority opinion was opposed to the Irishman. Furthermore, his refusal to appear before the bishops assembled at Chalon may have been grounded in part on the knowledge that the case had already been judged against him. Yet it must also have been grounded on the support, however qualified, of Theuderic. A comparison with the Synod of Mâcon is again helpful. In that instance, Chlothar II had decided that the issues were to be settled by a council of Burgundian bishops headed by Treticus, metropolitan bishop of Lyons.¹¹⁷ He had certainly not ordered the bishops to vindicate Eustasius (or rather all the faithful disciples of Columbanus represented by Eustasius); otherwise the presence of Warnachar, mayor of the Burgundian palace, would not have been such a threat (a threat averted by his providential death). Yet, in 603 at Chalon, either Columbanus was not condemned or his condemnation was rendered ineffective. Theuderic had presumably not decided that the Council of Chalon was to determine the issue once and for all. The royal court, not just the bishops, may have been divided. Such a situation of unresolved division, both at court and among the bishops as a whole, explains the effectiveness of Columbanus' chief tactic, the appeal to the authority of Rome.

Such appeals were not unknown in Francia. Two of the less respectable bishops of the sixth century, Sagittarius of Gap and Salonius of Embrun, had appealed to Pope John III against their condemnation.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ *Ep.* i. ¹¹⁷ Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, ii.9. ¹¹⁸ Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* v.20.

They too were summoned before a council of Burgundian bishops, presided over by Nicetius, bishop of Lyons. Yet, although they were condemned, and although it was King Guntram who had ordered the council to be summoned, Sagittarius and Salonius were able to persuade the king to give them, not just his permission to appeal to the pope, but even a letter of introduction to speed them on their way. Their case illustrates, however, that there had to be some wavering on the part of those responsible for a condemnation before an appeal to the pope became possible. It also illustrates the papal propensity to look kindly on those who appealed to the authority of Peter. Columbanus, however, had appealed to Rome some years before the Council of Chalon. Although on the precise point of the initial appeal – whether Victorius of Aquitaine was a reliable authority in paschal matters – the pope could not support Columbanus without condemning himself, neither, apparently, did Gregory the Great publicly decide against the appeal. At all events, Columbanus seems to have been strongly disposed to look to Rome to take the initiative on controversial questions as late as 613, the date of Letter v. Also, the first letter in the extant series was clearly not the first to be sent. It is a reply to a message from the pope sent via Candidus, the *rector* of the papal patrimony in Gaul. The message appears to have been oral; by responding in this way Gregory may have hoped to avoid having to make a formal reply which could scarcely have been other than negative from Columbanus' point of view. The Irishman, however, was unwilling to let the matter rest. In Letter i he was still arguing over the substance of the issue and doing so with both self-conscious boldness and skill.¹¹⁹ By the time of Letter iii, probably of 607, he had changed his tactics. In conformity with Letter ii, written to the Burgundian bishops, he argued, not that Victorius should be rejected, but that Irish *peregrini* should be allowed to live by their own rules, *regulae*. Admittedly, he enclosed with his letter two earlier ones sent to Gregory the Great, but the main burden of his case was now expressed in the appeal to conciliar authority in the final paragraph:

Farewell, pope most dear in Christ, mindful of us both in your holy prayers beside the ashes of the saints and in your most godly decisions following the hundred and fifty authorities of the Council of Constantinople,¹²⁰ who decreed that churches of God planted among barbarian people should live by their own laws, as they had been instructed by their fathers.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ D. R. Howlett, 'Two Works of Saint Columban: 1. Columban's First Letter to Gregory the Great', *Mittelaltinisches Jahrbuch*, 28 (1993), 27–35.

¹²⁰ The reference is to 1 Constantinople (AD 381), c. 2.

¹²¹ *Ep.* iii.3 (ed. Walker, pp. 24–5).

In the context of a Rome which had only recently sent out a mission to a notably barbarous nation, the English, all of whose laws and customs Augustine and his companions would certainly not have wished to adopt, this appeal was adroit.

In 610, however, Columbanus' position may have been much weaker, not because of any threat from Brunhild but rather because of the threat posed to Theuderic by Theudebert, king of the Austrasian Franks. In the division of the lands of Childebert II made between his sons Theudebert and Theuderic in 596, the division of 561 between Sigibert I and Guntram had largely been repeated. The exception was that four territories, previously Austrasian, were given to Theuderic: the Saintois in the Moselle valley, Alsace, the Thurgau and Campanensis.¹²² In 610 Theudebert compelled Theuderic to hand back these territories. As a result of this humiliation, Theuderic set about the destruction of his brother. Since even Jonas admits that Theuderic and Columbanus had previously been on good terms, and since this is borne out by the history of the paschal dispute, the likelihood is that Theuderic's weakness in 610 led to the expulsion of Columbanus. The Irishman was a source of division; the majority of the bishops were probably opposed to his continued influence; the powerful figure of Warnachar, later to be Eustasius' enemy, was perhaps already hostile. In such circumstances, Columbanus' continued presence would have been a risk. In Rome, too, the pope was now opposed to any extension of monastic influence in the church, of the kind which had been fostered by Gregory the Great. The royal command, however, was not directed against Luxeuil itself, which was to continue. Irish and British monks were allowed to accompany Columbanus; all others were commanded to remain; Letter iv shows that at least one Irishman, Librán, stayed.¹²³

Columbanus was worth expelling. His influence is confirmed by the welcome he received from Chlothar II once he had evaded his escort (not without their compliance, as Letter iv makes clear).¹²⁴ He was able to journey via Chlothar's small kingdom (Rouen, Beauvais and Amiens) to Paris and Meaux (where he met one of Theudebert's nobles, Chagnoald). He then went further up the Marne to Ussy, the estate of another of Theudebert's nobles, Authari, the father of the three brothers, Ado, Rado and Dado, who were later to play a major role in the

¹²² Fredegar, *Chronica*, iv.37; for the disputed identification of *Campanensis*, see the notes to the editions of Wallace-Hadrill (p. 29 n. 4) and Kusternig and Haupt (p. 192 n. 85).

¹²³ Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, i.20; *Ep.* iv. 3; for a different view see Ewig, *Die Merovingen*, p. 112.

¹²⁴ Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, i.24.

expansion of Columbanian monasticism.¹²⁵ When he reached Theudebert, perhaps at Metz, it was agreed that he should be given a site for a monastery at Bregenz by Lake Constance. There he would be in a position to preach Christianity to the pagan Swabians. When, however, in 612, Theudebert was defeated by Theuderic in two battles and was captured and put to death, Columbanus left for Italy. In Milan, he was welcomed by Agilulf, the Arian king of the Lombards, and his Catholic (but Aquileian) wife, Theudelinda.¹²⁶ They gave him a ruined church dedicated to St Peter at Bobbio in the Appenines.¹²⁷

Columbanus' ability to put himself at once at the centre of affairs is illustrated by Letter v.¹²⁸ This was written from Milan, where he met Agilulf and Theudelinda, and thus apparently before the foundation of Bobbio.¹²⁹ The date of the letter would appear to be late in 612 or 613, more probably 613 since he had already written a letter against the Aquileian bishop of Como, Agrippinus; either this was enclosed together with Letter v or, alternatively, he assumed that it was already available for the pope to read. Columbanus wrote to the pope, therefore, as a self-confessed defender of the reputation of Rome which had been assailed by the Aquileians. The Christians of Italy were divided between three groups: the Arians (Lombards and the remnants of the Ostrogoths who had thrown in their lot with the Lombards), the Aquileian or Trecapitoline Catholics who were in communion neither with Rome nor with the emperor in Constantinople, and finally those Catholics who were in communion with Rome. The division between the last two groups stemmed from Justinian's efforts to rally as much support as possible behind the definition of the union of divine and human natures in Jesus Christ adopted by the Council of Chalcedon (451).¹³⁰ The emperor's strategy was to issue a condemnation of three passages ('the Three Chapters') written by theologians belonging to a tradition disliked by those who opposed Chalcedon: for the latter, Chalcedon came too close to the views of Nestorius; and in the theological pedigree of Nestorius stood the three theologians whose 'three chapters' were to be condemned. Moderate opponents of Chalcedon would thus be reconciled.

¹²⁵ Prinz, *Frühes Mönchtum*, pp. 124–6.

¹²⁶ Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, iv.30; Bognetti, *L'età longobarda*, ii.160, 170–1, 284–6; Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 166–7.

¹²⁷ Jonas, *Vita S. Columbanii*, i.30; on the possible political significance of its situation, see Bognetti, *L'età longobarda*, ii.290–1.

¹²⁸ For a recent discussion, see P. T. R. Gray and M. W. Herren, 'Columbanus and the Three Chapters Controversy – a New Approach', *Journal of Theological Studies*, ns 45 (1994), 160–70.

¹²⁹ Bognetti, *L'età longobarda*, ii.286–7.

¹³⁰ J. Moorhead, *Justinian* (London, 1994), pp. 125–40.

For the emperor's strategy to succeed, the pope had to agree with the condemnation. Yet, although Rome was by then (545) again under imperial authority, and the pope could therefore be brought to Constantinople to be subjected to various forms of persuasion, Vigilius proved unwilling. Even though he owed his appointment to the imperial government in Italy, for him Chalcedon was sufficient, and nothing further should be added.¹³¹ There were prolonged discussions in which Vigilius' stance veered from outright opposition to Justinian to agreement. At one moment, the pope succeeded in escaping from Constantinople as far as Chalcedon on the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus; and, in a dramatic gesture, he took refuge in the very church where the council had been held a hundred years before, the basilica of St Euphemia. From this refuge he was lured, so it was said, by false promises, and he was then induced by force and threats of further force to agree to the emperor's demands. The news of what had happened rapidly spread to Illyricum, Italy and even to Frankish Gaul, where Childebert I summoned a council to meet at Orléans in 549, the first of whose declarations was that Chalcedon should be maintained, neither more nor less.¹³² Throughout the West, ecclesiastical opinion was generally hostile to Justinian. Yet the emperor's general, Narses, controlled Rome, and the pope who succeeded Vigilius – who soon died, of the effects of his ill-treatment so it was said – was prepared to follow the emperor's line.¹³³ The effect was that the papacy was committed to the condemnation of the Three Chapters.

The next emperor, Justin II, made conciliatory pronouncements about the integrity of Chalcedon, which helped to heal the breach with the Franks.¹³⁴ In any case the Franks had never taken the quarrel to the point at which they went into schism with the papacy.¹³⁵ In northern Italy and Illyricum, however, it was much more difficult to bring back theological concord. In 568 the Lombards had invaded Italy; and their

¹³¹ *Constitutum Vigili Papae de Tribus Capitulis*, ed. O. Guenther, *Epistolae Imperatorum, Pontificum, Aliorum . . . Avellana quae dicitur Collectio*, CSEL 35 (Prague and Vienna, 1895), no. 83 (pp. 230–320).

¹³² *Concilia Galliae*, ed. de Clercq, pp. 148–9; *Epistolae Arelatenses*, no. 45 (ed. W. Gundlach, MGH *Epistolae Merowingici et Karolini Aevi*, pp. 67–8), is a letter from Vigilius to Aurelian, bishop of Arles, of 29 April 549, defending his orthodoxy and promising to send a messenger who would explain in detail what had happened.

¹³³ *Epp. Arelatenses*, nos. 46–48, show Pelagius I attempting to restore good relations with Arles and with Childebert I.

¹³⁴ Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, ed. Leo, Appendix, ii (Ad Iustinum), lines 15–17: 'quam merito Romae Romanoque imperat orbi / qui sequitur quod ait dogma cathedra Petri, / quod cecinit Paulus passim . . .'

¹³⁵ As illustrated by the appeal to Pope John III (561–74) by Sagittarius of Gap and Salonius of Embrun, Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* v.20.

king, Alboin, had consciously rejected the Catholicism of the Empire and of the Franks in favour of the Arianism of the Goths.¹³⁶ From this point theological dispute and political conflict were intertwined in Italy. In imperial Italy, orthodox Catholicism, as defined by Justinian, prevailed; in Lombard Italy, the Aquileian or Trecapitoline schismatics were in the ascendant among the Roman population and among some Lombards. Not infrequently, the churches adjoining Lombard military centres were dedicated to St Euphemia – a direct proclamation of Chalcedonian faith without the additions of Justinian. The king, Agilulf, was an Arian; but his wife, Theudelinda, belonged to a Frankish noble family, the Agilolfings, who had been made dukes of the Bavarians and had married into an old royal family of the Lombards, the Lethings; she was both an adherent of the Aquileian schism and an important figure in Lombard politics. Her son, Adaloald, was of her persuasion, and he would succeed Agilulf in 616, a year after Columbanus' death.

Columbanus, therefore, faced a theological and political tangle which had proved too difficult for Gregory the Great to resolve. Unsurprisingly, it was also to prove too difficult for Columbanus; but his effort to produce agreement among the Catholics of Italy is interesting in itself, and interesting, too, for the student of Columbanus, not least because he made open and adroit use of his nationality. This was not something which he ever did in a monastic context. As abbot, he was the father of his monks, and it made no difference whether they were Irish, British, Frankish, Burgundian or Gallo-Roman. The unity of the monastic community – the dim reflection within a violent and passion-driven world of the concord of heaven – rendered all merely secular differences, whether of nationality or of social status, utterly irrelevant. Only the enemies of Columbanus adverted to his nationality. Yet in Letter v we find Columbanus himself proclaiming his Irishness to the pope. The reason he did so may be surprising to those whose image of early Irish Christianity is still dominated by the arguments of men such as Wilfrid of Ripon. Fifty years later Wilfrid, the spokesman of the *Romani* at the Synod of Whitby in 664, would argue that the Irish and the Britons stood alone against an orthodoxy upheld by Rome and by the rest of the Christian world. To Columbanus, who by the last years of his life had an exceptionally wide knowledge of western Christianity, the landscape looked utterly different

¹³⁶ Nicetius of Trier, *Epistolae Austrasicae*, no. 8 (ed. Gundlach, p. 121); Bognetti, *L'età longobarda*, ii.52–4.

For all we Irish, inhabitants of the world's edge, are disciples of Saints Peter and Paul and of all the disciples who wrote the divine scriptures inspired by the Holy Ghost, and we accept nothing outside the evangelical and apostolic teaching; none has been a heretic, none a Judaiser, none a schismatic; but the Catholic Faith, as it was delivered by you first, who are the successors of the holy apostles, is maintained unbroken.¹³⁷

Columbanus was proud to recall that Palladius, the first bishop of the Irish, was sent by Rome. The boast of Leo the Great, that papal Rome had spread the Christian faith over the ocean, to a nation never subdued by pagan Rome, is here endorsed:¹³⁸ the disciple addresses the master, confident in the teaching he has received, declaring that he has witnessed to Roman orthodoxy before 'those who revile you and call you the partisans of heretics and describe you as schismatics . . . For I promised on your behalf (as disciples should believe concerning their teacher) that the Roman Church defends no heretic against the Catholic Faith.'

This firm confession of Roman allegiance was not linked to any loyalty to the Roman Empire. The Irish were the disciples of Peter and Paul; they were not, and had never been, subjects of the heirs of Romulus and Remus. Columbanus, therefore, could use his Irish nationality to appeal to the pope as one untouched by the political overtones which theological opinions had acquired in northern Italy. An Italian could be a loyal subject of a Lombard king in part because he detested the theology of Justinian. For him, agreeing with the pope meant going over to 'the Greeks'; but for an Irishman, an inhabitant of the world's edge, it meant no such thing. Columbanus, therefore, could be a champion of Rome in Milan, whereas a pro-Roman bishop of Milan, Asterius, who would consecrate Birinus for the English mission some twenty years later, had to reside in Byzantine-controlled Genoa merely because he agreed with the pope. Columbanus had the authority of the outsider whose faith had come direct from Rome more than a century before Justinian exercised his arts of persuasion upon Pope Vigilius.

From his position, Columbanus offered Boniface IV an assessment of the attitudes of the Aquileians and an emphatic call to action. The Aquileians, in his view, were wavering between a desire for unity with the papacy and opposition to it. Many harsh things were being said about Rome. Almost as soon as Columbanus had crossed the frontier, he had received letters accusing the pope of slipping into the sect of Nestorius;

¹³⁷ Columbanus, *Ep.* v. 3 (ed. Walker, pp. 38–9). My translation differs a little from that of Walker.

¹³⁸ Leo the Great, *Tractatus*, ed. A. Chavasse, CCSL 138, 138 A (Turnhout, 1973), 82, p. 506; Charles-Edwards, 'Palladius, Prosper and Leo the Great', pp. 5–6.

and not just Nestorius, 'For they say that Eutyches, Nestorius, and Dioscorus, old heretics as we know, were favoured at some council, at the fifth, by Vigilius.' This was the moment for the pope to act, for the Arian Agilulf was himself grieved at the religious division of his people, because of his concern for his queen, Theudelinda, and their son, Adaloald. To this Columbanus adds, 'and perhaps for his sake also; for he is said to have remarked, that if he knew for certain [what the Catholics believed] he also would believe'.

The accusation that a pope had slipped into favouring both Eutyches and Dioscorus (champions of the Monophysite heresy) and Nestorius (their enemy who had gone to the other extreme) may seem extraordinary.¹³⁹ But we know from a letter of Nicetius of Trier that this was indeed the accusation at the time against Justinian and therefore against Pope Vigilius.¹⁴⁰ The accusation was thus made by Frankish bishops, not just by the Aquileians in Italy and Illyricum. Moreover, Nicetius' letter was preserved in the Austrasian letter collection put together in the 590s by someone concerned with diplomatic negotiations between the Franks and the Empire over Lombard Italy. In spite of the mending of fences achieved by Justin II, the issues were not forgotten. The Franks appear never to have accepted the authority of the Second Council of Constantinople. The range – and incompatibility – of such accusations offered Columbanus his opportunity. What he proposed was that the pope should summon a synod of Italian bishops and should make a confession of faith rebutting the accusations. Because they extended much wider than the narrow issue of the Three Chapters, the pope could do this without renewing that particular controversy. Indeed, the Three Chapters should be forgotten in a renewed defence of the true faith. Columbanus' standpoint, taking it for granted that it was right to remain in communion with Rome but not thereby giving an assent to the Second Council of Constantinople, was in accord with the Frankish position. Columbanus could thus suggest, in one of his typical word-plays, that Vigilius was much less vigilant than he should have been, in other words, that he should not have given way to Justinian. The proposal thus offered something to the Aquileians – the pope should proclaim his faith in Chalcedon, neither more nor less, something Pope Vigilius, in the end, failed to do – and something to the papacy – it should reas-

¹³⁹ See the discussion by Gray and Herren, 'Columbanus and the Three Chapters Controversy', 160–70. ¹⁴⁰ *Epistolae Austrasicae*, ed. Gundlach, no. 7.

sert its position within Italy as the guardian of Chalcedonian orthodoxy and demonstrate the falsehood of the accusations made against it.

The letter to Boniface IV shows the extraordinary position Columbanus had, and also some of the reasons why he had it. It is indeed extraordinary that an Arian king and an Aquileian Catholic queen should turn to 'a dull Irish *peregrinus*' in order to solve the religious problems of Italy. Yet the letter he wrote in response shows a capacity to weigh up the possibilities and to play the card often played by the papacy itself: putting oneself into the position of the simple but orthodox, not claiming to understand, perhaps, all the subtleties of current opinion but with a firm grasp of the faith handed down from the past.¹⁴¹ The letter also shows Columbanus to be the master of a particular form of rhetoric, delighting in elaborate metaphors and using a Latin prose as bold in its rhythmical structure as in the arguments expressed. He knew also how to make the right allusions: one central section of the letter rides on the back of the claims made by Leo the Great for papal Rome, claims in which Leo alluded to the sending of Palladius by Pope Celestine as a missionary to the Irish.¹⁴² The allusions are sufficiently light in their touch and creative in their further development to make it difficult to be sure that Columbanus had Leo's sermon 82 in front of him, but the parentage of the ideas is unmistakable. It is worth remembering that Gregory the Great had himself probably referred to Leo's argument in his *Moralia in Iob*: it was remembered in Rome in Columbanus' lifetime.¹⁴³ It is worth remembering also that we only have one half of the relevant dossier. Enclosed with the letter to Pope Boniface IV, or sent in advance, was Columbanus' reply to the Aquileian (probably Agrippinus, bishop of Como) who had cast aspersions on the papacy when Columbanus first entered Italy.¹⁴⁴ This reply was sent to Boniface in order that he should have the opportunity of suggesting corrections. In this way Columbanus ranged himself firmly on the side of Rome, while also claiming the right to offer blunt criticism. What we have, therefore, is Columbanus' friendly criticism of the papacy; what we lack is his defence of Rome against the Aquileians.

¹⁴¹ The interpretation of such historians as R. Schieffer, 'Zur Beurteilung des norditalischen Dreikapitel Schismas: eine überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studie', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, 87 (1976), 196–7, whereby Columbanus blundered into a situation he did not adequately understand, makes insufficient allowance for this manoeuvre and for the fact that, lacking his writings against the supporters of the Trecapitoline schism, we only have one side of what he wrote on the issue.

¹⁴² *Ep.* v.11. ¹⁴³ Charles-Edwards, 'Palladius, Prosper and Leo the Great', 11–12.

¹⁴⁴ *Ep.* v.16; cf. v. 3.

Columbanus' initiative of 613 did not have the desired effect. Why it failed we cannot know, but Bobbio was to retain the role Columbanus had adopted, as the defender of Rome in a Lombard kingdom which was partly Arian, partly pagan, partly Trecapitoline Catholic.¹⁴⁵ Eventually, it would succeed.

There are two other parts of Columbanus' work whose effectiveness needs to be assessed: his contributions to monastic life and to missionary work.

Before Columbanus, the monastic life of Gaul was predominantly southern, predominantly suburban and under episcopal control.¹⁴⁶ The main centres of monastic life were in Provence and the Rhône valley. The distribution was thus south-eastern and coincided with those areas in which the elite was still constituted by the Gallo-Roman senatorial aristocracy to which Sidonius Apollinaris and Gregory of Tours belonged.¹⁴⁷ Within its southern, Romanised homeland, monasticism was concentrated around, but not within, the walls of cities. Nunneries were quite often within the walls and thus close to the episcopal cathedral, but monasteries of men were typically adjacent to the suburban cemeteries. It was accepted in Antiquity that the dead should be buried outside the walls.¹⁴⁸ It was common for churches to be founded in these extramural cemeteries and some were served by monastic communities, especially where the relics of an important saint were situated. Gregory of Tours uses *ecclesia* for the episcopal church; the others, and notably the cemetery churches, were *basilicae*; where the holy dead lay buried were the *basilicae sanctorum*, the basilicas of the saints.¹⁴⁹ Because monasticism was usually urban, it reflected the urban-centred, episcopally controlled character of Gallic Christianity. It was not often sponsored by kings except for their suburban burial churches, nor by magnates of Frankish

¹⁴⁵ Jonas, *Vita S. Columbanii*, ii.23.

¹⁴⁶ F. Prinz, 'Columbanus, the Frankish Nobility and the Territories East of the Rhine', in H. B. Clarke and M. Brennan (eds.), *Columbanus and Merovingian Monasticism*, BAR, International Series 113 (Oxford, 1981), pp. 75–77; H. Atsma, 'Les monastères urbains du nord de la Gaule', *Revue d'Histoire de l'Eglise de France*, 62 (1976), 163–87 (esp. p. 184: of eighty-five urban monasteries surveyed, only ten were inside the walls; of these, nine were nunneries; male houses were thus suburban).

¹⁴⁷ Stroheker, *Der senatorische Adel im spätantiken Gallien*, pp. 114–15, and map III, p. 234.

¹⁴⁸ T. Klauser (ed.), *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, iii (Stuttgart, 1957), cols. 231–5, s.v. *coemiterium*.

¹⁴⁹ Gregory of Tours, *Vita Patrum*, iv. 2 (ed. Krusch, p. 225), 'de sanctis quorum basilicae muros urbis ambiunt'; idem, *Hist.* v.1, records an Epiphany procession from the *ecclesia*, the cathedral church of Tours, to the *sancta basilica*, the church of St Martin outside the walls. Cf. Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 29. 2, *Basilica Sanctorum*, Baislec, the church of Bishop Sachellus (ibid. 32.5), where there were relics of Peter, Paul, Laurence and Stephen from Armagh, according to the passage in Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, p. 122 (II.3 5).

birth unless they were also bishops. There were Frankish monks, as well as those of other nationalities, but the current of monasticism still flowed in the old Gallo-Roman channels bequeathed from the fourth and fifth centuries.

The extent and limits of episcopal control of monasticism are shown by Gregory of Tours' accounts of, first, Wulfolaic, the Lombard pillar-saint of Carignan in the Ardennes, and, secondly, the relations between St Radegund, founder of the nunnery of the Holy Cross in Poitiers, and her bishop, Maroveus. Gregory's account of Wulfolaic is based on a conversation he had with him on his way back from visiting King Childebert at Coblenz in 585.¹⁵⁰ Wulfolaic had been brought up by Aredius, abbot of Limoges, and had been ordained a deacon.¹⁵¹ What especially endeared him to Gregory, however, was his devotion to St Martin ever since his childhood, and the stories he had to tell of the power of his chosen saintly patron, himself both bishop and monk. When an adult, Wulfolaic built his own cell, with a pillar beside it, close to a statue of the goddess Diana on a hill at Carignan. From this pillar he persuaded the local countrymen that the statue was powerless; once this piece of persuasion had been accomplished he was able to enlist their help to destroy the statue. So far, an exemplary combination of ascetic renunciation and missionary persuasion, but

Because the same Jealous One [*sc.* the Devil] always seeks to harm those who search for God, there came to me bishops whose duty it was to exhort me to persevere wisely in the task which I had begun. Instead they said to me: 'The way you are following is not right! Such an obscure person as you can never be compared with Simeon the Stylite of Antioch . . . Come down off your column and live with the brethren whom you have gathered around you.' Since it is judged to be a sin not to obey bishops, I came down.

Gregory doubtless believed that it was a sin to disobey bishops, but he also believed that bishops had a duty to support true monks.

If one was of royal blood and had been the queen of Chlothar I, obedience to bishops was not so automatic. Radegund was a Thuringian princess, part of the booty brought back when the Franks conquered Thuringia in 531–5.¹⁵² Chlothar I married her, but when he had arranged for the assassination of her brother, she persuaded him to allow her to found a nunnery in Poitiers.¹⁵³ the bitterness of the memories of the conquest of her homeland are well evoked in Venantius Fortunatus'

¹⁵⁰ *Hist.* viii.15–16. ¹⁵¹ On Aredius see Prinz, *Frühes Mönchtum*, 114.

¹⁵² *Hist.* iii.7; Ewig, *Die Merowinger*, p. 34. ¹⁵³ Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* iii.7.

poem on the destruction of Thuringia, composed for Radegund in her old age.¹⁵⁴ Yet, though Radegund's feelings for Chlothar, who was not to die until 561, may have been cool, she knew how to make him give royal support to her plans, and she displayed the same diplomatic skills with his son (by another woman) and successor in Austrasia, Sigibert I.¹⁵⁵ An embassy from Sigibert was the occasion to renew contacts with her brother, Amalofred, who was an exile in Constantinople, and to receive from the Emperor Justin II and the Empress Sophia a relic of the True Cross.¹⁵⁶ This relic she asked the bishop of Poitiers, Maroveus, to install in the nunnery with due ceremony.¹⁵⁷ He refused point blank: for him, it seems, the shrine of St Hilary, his fourth-century predecessor, was the only cult-centre he wished to see in his episcopal city.¹⁵⁸ This discourtesy was nothing unusual, for, says Gregory,

Subsequently, Radegund very frequently sought the favour of the bishop, but she received none, and she and the abbess whom she appointed were forced to travel to Arles. From there they brought the Rule of Saint Caesarius and the blessed Caesaria, and they put themselves under the protection of the king, for they could find no willingness to look after them in the man who should have been their pastor.¹⁵⁹

In the eyes of Gregory (a neighbouring bishop) Maroveus' refusal to give episcopal support drove Radegund and her abbess to take two unusual steps: to adopt the Rule of Caesarius and to seek the special protection of the king. Columbanus, as we shall see, may well have adopted the first course and almost certainly adopted the second.¹⁶⁰

The monastic life at Poitiers permitted, if one may judge by the poems of Venantius Fortunatus, a modicum of aristocratic gracious living.¹⁶¹ The nunnery contained, after all, one daughter of Chilperic I and another nun who claimed, probably truthfully, to be the daughter of Charibert I.¹⁶² The monasteries founded by Columbanus saw, in his lifetime, no such compromises with the values of the secular world. As we have seen, the predominant theme of the first part of Jonas' account of Columbanus in Gaul is hunger and the threat of starvation. Even when food was in reasonable supply it was to be vegetarian and taken only in

¹⁵⁴ Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, Appendix, I. ¹⁵⁵ *Hist.* ix.40.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, ix.40; Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, Appendix, II, esp. lines 55–60.

¹⁵⁷ Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* ix.40.

¹⁵⁸ For its importance, cf. Nicetius of Trier to Chlodosuin, *Epistolae Austrasicae*, no. 8 (ed. Gundlach, p. 121). ¹⁵⁹ Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* ix.40.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. the letter of Eufronius *et al.* *ibid.*, ix.39, and *Concilia Galliae*, ed. de Clercq, pp. 194–6.

¹⁶¹ Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, xi, e.g. 4, 8, 9. ¹⁶² Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* ix.39.

the evening.¹⁶³ The monk was to fast daily, except perhaps on Sundays and feast days; that is, his norm resembled the lesser degree of fasting, by which one renounced meat and wine.¹⁶⁴

Yet a vegetarian diet was not the distinctive characteristic of Columbanian monasticism. To explain what was, it is helpful to bear in mind two approaches to the spiritual life: that of the solitary individual and that of the community.¹⁶⁵ The way of the individual considers the only significant relationship to be that between a single person and God. This may be differently conceived in different traditions, but all are based upon a single premiss: each person dies alone and goes, alone, to meet the divine judge; as the end is solitary, so, ultimately, is the spiritual life. The way of the community is quite different. It is also based upon a conception of the end of human life, but that is no longer the individual soul before the judgement seat, but the perfect community of heaven, the fatherland, as Columbanus insisted in his sermons – the destination to which the present life is just the road. In that perfect community, no one has hidden purposes or concealed grievances. The human personality is transparent because illuminated by divine love. The monastery is an image of this divine community set within a changeable world, and set against, in particular, the secular community ruled by *superciliosum*, the principle of pride, and *concupiscentiae*, the disordered and far-ranging desires of man.¹⁶⁶ The *superciliosum* leads to war – it is the counterpart, in Columbanus, of the *libido dominandi*, the lust to dominate, in Augustine.¹⁶⁷ The *concupiscentiae* lead to *beluinum*, the beast-like element in man, unilluminated and ungoverned by reason. Because monks and nuns are fallen men and women, they must struggle against pride and concupiscence: against the first by obedience and against the second by poverty and fasting. But these devices of the spiritual life are only ways to buttress the external defences; they do not supply the life within. That is fed by the communal praise of God in the monastic liturgy and the

¹⁶³ *Reg. Mon.* iii, in Walker (ed.), *Sancti Columbani Opera*.

¹⁶⁴ 'Ergo cottidie ieiunandum est, sicut cottidie reficiendum', *Reg. Mon.* c. 3; cf. the Old Irish Penitential, i. 14 (tr. D. A. Binchy in Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, p. 261). Beer is mentioned as if it were drunk, *Reg. Coen.* 3 (in Walker, ed., *Sancti Columbani Opera*; similarly Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, i.16); *Reg. Mon.* 3 is ambiguous: drink should not intoxicate. The birds sent, apparently by divine miracle, in Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, i.27, imply that Columbanus was in a desert like the people of Israel (Numbers 11:31); and, similarly, the five fishes of i.7 recall the five loaves and two fishes of Matthew 14:17. Such scriptural references prove little.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. R. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 157–68.

¹⁶⁶ *Ep.* vi.2.
¹⁶⁷ *De Civitate Dei*, xiv.28; on which see Brown, *Religion and Society in the Age of Saint Augustine*, pp. 36–7.

constant effort to make the individual transparent to the community.¹⁶⁸ Each of Columbanus' monks was to confess his sins of thought and word, not just of action, once a day. The confession of self-will to brethren who shared the same obligation to be open-hearted was an essential means to spiritual growth.¹⁶⁹

The monastery also existed within the lay world which its values were intended to contradict. Unless it was perceived as worthwhile by that lay world, it received few recruits and little material support. Columbanus' monasteries had a function which was based on two principles: the first was that prayer to God is the more acceptable the more the life of those who pray resembles the life of God himself. To pray to Christ well, it is necessary to be Christlike. Secondly, one Christian can pray effectively for another; the Church is thus a community of vicarious prayer. If these two principles are put together, the monk has a crucial role: he is a specialist in prayer; he should be a person whose prayer is peculiarly acceptable; and he can pray not just for himself, but for the lay world outside the monastery. In the Durham *Liber Vitae* ('Book of Life'), for example, we have a mass of names of those for whom the community was to pray; and this list stretches back in time to the earliest days of the Lindisfarne community founded by Aidan, the Iona monk and bishop of the Northumbrians, c. 636. As the *Liber Vitae* illustrates, such prayer was for the dead as well as for the living.¹⁷⁰

A concern for the dead had been in evidence in Francia before Columbanus reached its shores. Chlothar I, the youngest of Clovis' sons, who was, and knew himself to be, deeply stained with sin, made careful arrangements for his death.¹⁷¹ St Medard, his contemporary, bishop of Noyon, was to be buried, not at Noyon, but outside the walls of the royal capital at Soissons. There the king was building a church where the saint and the king were to be buried together: for both of them the wealth of the king provided a shrine, for both the holiness of the bishop offered hope of salvation. Chlothar put his trust in the dead saint: the holy dead might save the unholy dead. Later Irish kings also would regularly gain admittance to monastic cemeteries to lie in death close to the patron saint; at this period, however, the Irish norm was for the laity and monks to be buried separately.¹⁷² Prayer for the dead was a central duty of any

¹⁶⁸ *Reg. Coen.* i. ¹⁶⁹ Cf. *Vita I.S. Lugidi*, c. 37, in Heist, *Vitae*, pp. 138–9.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. *Hib.* xv.2, 4 (from Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*); *CIH* 529. 21 (more correctly 1294.16, *imann anma*, 'a hymn sung for a soul'); *gabáil écnairce*, 'reciting a prayer for the absent', i.e. the dead: 2129. 34; 2130. 10–11, 25 (*Riagail Phátraic*). ¹⁷¹ Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* iv.19, 21.

¹⁷² It is a corollary of this situation that kings and others might desire to become monks to benefit from the privilege: see above, p. 117.

Irish church; the prayers of a community whose lives were Christ-like offered the most secure hope available. This was a central element in what Columbanian monasticism offered Francia.

There were further things a monk could do provided that he was not still a beginner in the religious life. When Agrestius asked Eustasius to be allowed to preach the Gospel to the pagans, his request was refused. The reason was not, however, because monks were intended to stay in their monasteries and should therefore leave preaching to the bishop, but rather because Agrestius was still *rudis in religione*, an unformed beginner in the religious life. The site of Luxeuil was by some hot springs surrounded by 'a dense throng of stone images'.¹⁷³ Like Wulfolaic's monastery at Carignan, Columbanus' was so placed as to draw off all the inner energy from pagan cults. To that extent, the monastery as such might be a missionary community; likewise individual monks, provided they were tried and tested, might become missionaries. Columbanus did so at Bregenz;¹⁷⁴ Jonas himself was working as a missionary while writing the Life of Columbanus. Similarly, a monk might become a bishop: Luxeuil and its daughter-houses were to be nurseries of bishops in the seventh century, beginning with Columbanus' godson, Donatus, bishop of Besançon, and Chagnoald, his special assistant, later to be bishop of Laon.¹⁷⁵ For some monks, therefore, the monastery was not a lifelong home, but a school for pastoral and missionary work. It could also be a preliminary, for a very few, to life as a hermit, the monastic form of the other pattern of the religious life in which the individual sought God by himself, not in a community. Some Irish monasteries had places set aside for hermits: there was one close to the monastery of Hinba founded by Columba.¹⁷⁶

One aspect of the monastic life instituted by Columbanus remains controversial; and it is of crucial importance for those who would distinguish between Columbanian and *irofränkisch* or Hiberno-Frankish monasticism. The question is the date and context of the introduction of the Rule of St Benedict into Columbanian monasteries.¹⁷⁷ The puzzle is there, by implication, in Jonas' Life. According to him, Donatus, bishop of Besançon, founded a monastery at a place called Iussanum; there, 'in his love of the blessed Columbanus', he instituted the latter's rule.¹⁷⁸ Yet

¹⁷³ Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, i.10. ¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, i.27.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, i.14, 17; Prinz, *Frühes Mönchtum*, p. 123. ¹⁷⁶ Adomnán, *VSC*, iii.27 (131b).

¹⁷⁷ Prinz, *Frühes Mönchtum*, pp. 262–92; G. Moyse, 'Monachisme et réglementation monastique en Gaule avant Benoît d'Aniane', in *Sous la Règle de Saint Benoît: Structures monastiques et sociétés en France du moyen âge à l'époque moderne* (Geneva–Paris, 1982), pp. 3–19 (a useful brief survey of the early diffusion of the Rule). ¹⁷⁸ Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, i.14.

we have the text of the Rule of Donatus for his foundation and its principal sources are the Rule of St Benedict, the *Regula Monachorum* of Columbanus and the Rule of Caesarius of Arles (the one earlier adopted by Radegund at Poitiers).¹⁷⁹ The monastery at Faremoutiers in the valley of the Marne was said by Jonas to have been founded with the Rule of Columbanus;¹⁸⁰ here the nuns in fact lived by a combination of the Rule of St Benedict and the Rule of St Columbanus.¹⁸¹ This was, indeed, so widespread that the Columbanian monasteries were the principal agents by which the Rule of St Benedict was spread in Western Europe before the Carolingian period.¹⁸² Yet if Jonas' words are to be accepted as accurate, one would have to believe that Columbanus himself combined his *Regula Monachorum* with the Rule of St Benedict. The so-called 'mixed rule' would then be due to the Irish saint, and he would have to be regarded as the most important promoter of the Benedictine Rule before Charlemagne and Louis the Pious.¹⁸³

Not all are prepared to go so far.¹⁸⁴ But, first, we need to set the question in context. When a pre-Carolingian text refers to the rule of a given monastic founder or to the rule of a given monastery, it is often not referring to a written text. A founder establishes the pattern of life within his monastery; and that pattern may be handed down as a set of oral prescriptions backed up by communal habit. Such an oral rule may be indebted to one or more written texts, but a writer commending the monastic expertise of a founder is likely to say that he knew the customs of several ancient and highly regarded communities, not that he spent long hours in the monastic library devouring the contents of a book-cupboard labelled 'Rules'.¹⁸⁵ When 'the mixed rule' took the form of a combination of the rules of Benedict and Columbanus, as it frequently did in Francia in the seventh century, this was one variety of a widespread phenomenon.¹⁸⁶ Moreover, although there are two written rules claiming Columbanus as their author, and the Rule of St Benedict is, of course, a written text, it does not follow that the particular combination found in any given monastery was yet another written text.

The first unambiguous evidence for the Rule of St Benedict in Gaul comes in a letter from a certain Venerandus, abbot of Alta Ripa, to

¹⁷⁹ Prinz, *Frühes Mönchtum*, pp. 80–1. ¹⁸⁰ Jonas, *Vita S. Columbanii*, ii.11.

¹⁸¹ Prinz, *Frühes Mönchtum*, p. 143. ¹⁸² *Ibid.*, chap. vi, esp. p. 272.

¹⁸³ A. de Vogüé, in A. de Vogüé and J. Neufville, *La Règle de S. Benoît*, 6 vols., SC 181–6 (Paris, 1971–2), i.163–6. ¹⁸⁴ Prinz, *Frühes Mönchtum*, Nachtrag zur 2. Auflage, pp. 645–6.

¹⁸⁵ *Vita Ceolfridi*, c. 6 (ed. Plummer, *Baedae Opera Historica*, i.390).

¹⁸⁶ A. de Vogüé, *Les Règles monastiques anciennes (400–700)*, Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental, 46 (Turnhout, 1985), p. 39, notes that the rules of Benedict and Columbanus were used by abbots as 'sources of inspiration'.

Constantius, bishop of Albi; the letter is dated to between 620 and 630.¹⁸⁷ This is only a few years before the foundation of the Aquitanian monastery of Solignac by Eligius, the goldsmith at the court of Dagobert and later bishop, in which the mixed rule was followed. Constantius was also a correspondent of Desiderius, bishop of Cahors, another of the group of able men gathered round Dagobert who promoted Columbanian monasticism. These links look as though they may be part of the chain by which the Rule of St Benedict came from Italy to Gaul. In that case, the Rule would have become a standard element in Columbanian monasticism through the influence of network of monastic association and friendships centred upon the court of Dagobert I; it would have nothing to do with Columbanus.

A third possibility, intermediate between the other two, is that the introduction of the Rule of St Benedict was part of the changes brought about by the Synod of Mâcon in 626/7.¹⁸⁸ This fits the chronological evidence well, if we suppose that Donatus's Rule for the Burgundian monastery of Iussanum was introduced at its foundation in 632 rather than later.¹⁸⁹ Prinz has argued against this idea, first, that the Rule of St Benedict was actively spread within Gaul by the Columbanian monasteries; secondly, that the Burgundian bishops remained hostile to Columbanian monasticism after 626/7, as shown by the geographical distribution of Hiberno-Frankish communities; and, therefore, that the bishops were unlikely to have urged the adoption of a rule, that of Benedict, which was to make progress only in the monasteries that looked to Columbanus as the founder of their way of life, and not in the Rhône valley.¹⁹⁰ On this view, southern Gaul may have been the channel through which the Rule of St Benedict came to the Columbanian monasteries, but it did not supply any of the driving force behind its rapid spread in the north.

There are three principal issues at stake in this debate: the date at which, and the channel by which, the Rule of St Benedict was introduced to northern Gaul; but also, thirdly, the reason why its use became so general among monasteries of the Columbanian allegiance. All three theories provide an answer to the third question: in chronological order they are, first, the example of Columbanus himself, so that the adoption

¹⁸⁷ For the text of the letter, see L. Traube, *Textgeschichte der Regula S. Benedicti* (Munich, 1908), pp. 92–3; cf. de Vogüé and Neufville, *La Règle de S. Benoît*, i.157–63; Prinz, *Frühes Mönchtum*, pp. 267–8, 645–6.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. A de Vogüé, *Jonas de Bobbio: Vie de Saint Colomban et ses disciples*, pp. 63–9, esp. 67–9.

¹⁸⁹ Krusch in his introduction to MGH SRM iv, p. 24; cf. *Vita S. Columbanii*, i.14.

¹⁹⁰ Prinz, *Frühes Mönchtum*, pp. 287–8.

of the Rule of St Benedict occurred at the start; secondly, the most serious crisis for Columbanian monasticism in the period of about twenty years between his death and the date at which charter evidence for the Rule of St Benedict in Columbanian monasteries becomes available; and thirdly, the emergence in the reign of Dagobert I (629–39) of a group at court strongly supportive of the monastic way of life of Columbanus.

Dom Adalbert de Vogüé has adduced new evidence for the old theory of Mabillon that Columbanus himself knew the Rule of Benedict.¹⁹¹ He has argued that a sentence of the *Regula Monachorum* contains a direct echo of Chapter 5 of the Rule of St Benedict.¹⁹² Since the evidence lies in a single sentence and the verbal correspondence is admittedly incomplete, the argument does not amount to a proof. There is, by comparison, much more evidence for use of Cassian's *Institutes*.¹⁹³ Yet two arguments may offer some support for the thesis of Mabillon and de Vogüé. One is the fact, already noted, that the only way to reconcile Jonas' statements about the rules of the various daughter-houses of Luxeuil is to suppose that by 'the rule of Columbanus' he meant not the *Regula Monachorum* or the *Regula Coenobialis*, but a rule which combined Columbanus' own prescriptions with the Rule of St Benedict (this rule of Columbanus would not itself be a written text but an orally prescribed way of life with textual sources). The other argument is the character of the *Regula Monachorum* itself when compared with the *Institutes* of Cassian, which Columbanus certainly knew, and the Rule of St Benedict, which he may have known. In both Cassian's and Benedict's rules, there are two main elements: a treatise on monastic virtues and vices and regulations for the practice of the monastic life. Cassian has more of the moral treatise, Benedict more of the practical regulations, but although the two elements occur in different proportions, they are both there. The *Regula Monachorum*, however, is constructed as a brief treatise on monastic virtues with only one digression into practical regulation, a section on the monastic office.¹⁹⁴ With that one exception, there is no overlap with the (much) longer of the two parts of the Rule of St Benedict, namely that devoted to practical regulations. They were

¹⁹¹ De Vogüé and J. Neufville, *La Règle de S. Benoît*, i.163–9.

¹⁹² *Columbanus Reg. Mon.* i, 'quia oboedientia Deo exhibetur, dicente Domino nostro Iesu Christo: Qui uos audit, me audit', from *Regula S. Benedicti*, c. 5: 'quia oboedientia quae maioribus praebetur, Deo exhibetur. Ipse enim dixit: Qui uos audit, me audit.'

¹⁹³ Prinz, *Frühes Mönchtum*, pp. 645–6.
¹⁹⁴ A. de Vogüé with P. Sangiani and J.-B. Juglar, *Saint Colomban: Règles et pénitentiels monastiques* (Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1989), pp. 32–3: 'on cherche en vain une législation qui structure la communauté, distribue des rôles, modèle les observances'.

thus easily combined. One may perhaps go further and ask whether they were not intended to be combined from the start.¹⁹⁵

Against de Vogüé's case, it has been argued that there is no convincing channel by which the Rule of St Benedict might have reached Columbanus. One might suppose that Gregory the Great, who was in correspondence with Columbanus, might have been the channel. Yet Gregory is thought not to have been a disciple of St Benedict and not to have imposed St Benedict's Rule on his own monastery. In the time of Gregory the Great, the Rule of St Benedict did not have the central position that it acquired in Francia in the seventh century: it was not yet the case that, whatever combination of rules was used to establish the way of life of a given community, the Rule of St Benedict would be one of those used.¹⁹⁶ One has to remember that, for a period in which monastic rules were frequently combined one with another, to ask of any monk whether he was a Benedictine or not is to put an anachronistic question. Benedict himself, in the last chapter of the Rule, envisages the use of other guides, including the Rule of Basil and the *Institutes* of Cassian, in combination with his own. Similarly, from the fact that Gregory did not give a central position to the Rule of St Benedict in his own monastic observance, it follows neither that he was not well acquainted with the Rule nor that he would not have recommended its use among other rules. If one accepts the authenticity of Gregory's *Dialogues*, one must also accept that Gregory praised the Rule of St Benedict. It is also claimed that questions about the monastic life were not discussed in the correspondence between Gregory and Columbanus. Against this are two points: first, that we do not have the whole correspondence and, secondly, that the claim is incorrect. Columbanus raised an important question about the rule of stability;¹⁹⁷ this question was later of direct relevance to the case of Agrestius.¹⁹⁸ Finally, given the admittedly sketchy state of the evidence on the channels by which rules were transmitted, there can be no valid argument from silence: if the textual evidence suggests that Columbanus knew the Rule of St Benedict, it is of little consequence to say that we do not know how he came to know it. That he knew the Rule does not imply that he imposed it on his monks; but, given its later ubiquity in Columbanian monasteries, de

¹⁹⁵ De Vogüé's view, *ibid.*, is that while the Rule of St Benedict was known at Luxeuil from the time of Columbanus, it was his disciples who turned to it in search of written prescriptions, thus creating a 'Mixed Rule' that itself was a written text.

¹⁹⁶ Hallinger, 'Papst Gregor der Grosse und der hl. Benedikt', 231–319; Prinz, *Frühes Mönchtum*, p. 646.

¹⁹⁷ *Ep.* i.7.

¹⁹⁸ Jonas, *Vita S. Columbanii*, ii.9.

Vogüé's evidence offers a possible way to defend Jonas: he could have been correct in implying that a mixed (oral) rule including, as one of its sources, the Rule of St Benedict was inherited from Columbanus himself.

The balance of probability, therefore, is in favour of the thesis put forward by Mabillon and de Vogüé that Columbanus knew the Rule of St Benedict. When this is added to Jonas' testimony and the evident incompleteness of Columbanus' own Rules, there is an argument that by 'the rule of Columbanus' was meant an oral rule of monastic life; and that this rule had textual sources, of which one was the Rule of St Benedict but others were the monastic works of Cassian and Basil. The first implication of the position is that the most important moment in the early history of the Benedictine Rule was when it was adopted as a source – not, of course the sole source – of the pattern of monastic life bequeathed by Columbanus. A further implication is that we must reject the account of Columbanian monasticism according to which its character was transformed by the third abbot of Luxeuil, Waldebert, in conjunction with the court of Dagobert. That court's support greatly extended the influence of Columbanian monasticism, but did not fundamentally change its character. On that score, Jonas appears not to have misrepresented the truth.

Jonas, however, stands accused of deception in other areas. The structure of the *Life*, moving from the internal affairs of the monasteries in the first half of Book I to the break with Theuderic and its aftermath in the second half, allowed Jonas to pass over the long years of support given by Theuderic (and probably Brunhild). The substitution of Sigibert's name for that of Childebert II allowed him to avoid acknowledging the role of Brunhild's son in the foundation of Luxeuil. It was also a necessary consequence of this approach that Jonas minimised Columbanus' concern with royal and aristocratic support. The true pattern is revealed by the saint's presence at Theudebert's court where he obtained the grant of Bregenz, and at Agilulf's where he obtained the grant of Bobbio. No such approach of the holy man to the court – inevitably not very holy – is mentioned in the chapter on the foundation of Luxeuil,¹⁹⁹ but it would be very surprising if it had not occurred.²⁰⁰ Jonas

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, i.10.

²⁰⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, i.24 on Chlothar II's court: 'ob quibusdam erroribus, quos vix aula regia caret'; and *Die Briefe des heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus*, ed. M. Tangl, MGH Epistolae Selectae, i (Berlin, 1916), no. 63. See I. N. Wood, 'Jonas, the Merovingians and Pope Honorius', in A. C. Murray (ed.), *After Rome's Fall* (Toronto, 1998), pp. 99–120.

is likely, therefore, to be at his least reliable on the role of kings in Columbanus' career. Whereas recent scholarship has, on the whole, accepted his account of relations between Theuderic, Brunhild and Columbanus, it has maintained that there was a transformation in the nature and role of Columbanian monasticism during the 630s, a transformation which Jonas, writing in the immediate aftermath, largely concealed. The argument of this chapter is that the reverse is closer to the truth. The account of Theuderic is the one we should distrust; and, while there was a major increase in the influence of Columbanian monasticism in the reign of Dagobert, no transformation occurred in its character. The one important issue, apart from the role of kings, on which Jonas resolutely refused to tell his readers the truth was the long disagreement over Easter; this silence, however, is consistent not just with his conception of the continuity of monastic practice at Luxeuil and Bobbio, but also with the political necessity not to mention the steady support Theuderic gave to Columbanus before 610. The bishops were the principal threat to Luxeuil, the king its principal patron.

Hiberno-Frankish, *irofränkisch*, is the adjective in current use to express that unity of Irish founder with Frankish royal and aristocratic support which lay at the foundation of the wide influence enjoyed by Luxeuil, above all under its long-lived third abbot, Waldebert (629–70). At the level of saint and king, this term expresses a clear truth. It is less happy at the level of the aristocracy: the aristocratic supporters of Luxeuil included Gallo-Romans, such as Waldalenus, the father of Donatus, and Franks, such as Authari, father of the powerful trio, Ado, Rado and Dado. Early disciples of aristocratic background included Athala, of a Burgundian noble family, and Eustasius, who was probably Gallo-Roman.²⁰¹ Columbanian monasticism helped to forge a greater unity of outlook and a deeper Christian commitment among the elite at the courts of Chlothar II and Dagobert. Yet effect should not be confused with cause. The monasticism of Columbanus was attractive to men and women of many different national backgrounds; if any seem to have predominated in the early years, they seem to have been, apart from Columbanus' fellow *peregrini* from Ireland, Britons (including Bretons), Gallo-Romans and Burgundians rather than Franks. In any case, the danger in the term 'Hiberno-Frankish' is that it adopts the viewpoint of

²⁰¹ On Athala's experience of Lérins, cf. Gregory the Great, *Registrum* xi.12, and vi.56. The evidence for Eustasius being a Gallo-Roman by descent is his name: in the sixth century Gallo-Romans occasionally adopted Frankish names, but Franks did not adopt Roman names; his maternal uncle was Mietius, bishop of Langres. Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, i.20.

his enemies, for whom nationality was important, in preference to that of Columbanus, for whom it was not. When Columbanus was expelled in 610, the royal command stated that only Irish and British monks were to accompany him; the rest were commanded to stay. Columbanus himself adverted to his Irish origins only in order to secure the liberty to keep his paschal observance and, later, in order to secure his position in Italy.

Bertulf, abbot of Bobbio, who first commissioned Jonas to write the *Life*, was a kinsman of Arnulf, the politically influential bishop of Metz. Bertulf exemplifies the enduring bond between the Columbanian monasteries. He joined Luxeuil during the abbacy of Eustasius; subsequently Athala came on a visit to Luxeuil and asked that Bertulf should join him:

Then, on Athala's arrival from Italy, he [Bertulf] was joined to his fellowship with the agreement and retaining the bond of peace of Eustasius, because they were one heart and one soul, and no trace of discord remained as long as they exchanged monks subject to them in both directions in turn.²⁰²

Jonas, himself a monk of Bobbio, had come to Luxeuil, and from there had been sent as helper to Bishop Amand in his missionary work in the north. Wider connections also remained: the Antiphonary of Bangor appears to have travelled from its home in Ulster to Bobbio about a hundred years after Columbanus sailed from the same monastery. All those bonded by these links, whatever their nationality, looked back to Columbanus as their patron and the founder of their way of life. They did so without any serious misrepresentation of the truth.

²⁰² Ibid., ii.23.

CHAPTER NINE

The Paschal controversy

(I) TIME, POWER AND THE CALENDAR

The paschal controversy arose from a question which, at first sight, seems to be of minor importance: the correct way of determining the date of Easter. Yet it was the most important dispute in the Irish Church until it was finally resolved in 716: most significantly, it divided the Irish Church into two opposing camps, the 'Romans' and the 'Irish' or 'Hibernian' party, governed by separate synods.¹ There were, also, further consequences: the claims put forward by Kildare and Armagh that they were the sees of archbishops were largely stimulated by the dispute;² it helped to sour relations between Columbanus and the Frankish episcopate; it hampered the progress of the Irish mission to the English, and, for a time, even the Irish mission to the Picts. To understand why the paschal controversy could be of such importance for Irish churchmen, as well as for men of other nations concerned with the Irish Church (such as Athala, abbot of Bobbio, Eustasius, abbot of Luxeuil, or the Englishmen, Wilfrid and Bede), it is necessary, first, to have a rough understanding of how the date of Easter was fixed; secondly, to grasp the significance of the feast of Easter in the theology of the time; and, thirdly, to see how secondary issues became inextricably entangled with the primary issue.

In the letter of Ceolfriht, abbot of Wearmouth-Jarrow, to Nechtan, king of the Picts, written about 710, four rules are laid down:³

Easter must fall

(1) in the first lunar month of the year;

¹ For example, *Hib.* xx.6 is an *institutio Romana*, the terms of which betray a strongly 'Roman' standpoint on the paschal question; xli.8–10, xlii.27 are good examples of rulings by a *Sinodus Hibernensis*, an 'Hibernian synod', the last of which is unintelligible without a knowledge of both Old Irish and Irish law (*uinctus* = *cimbid*, *uinculum* = *naidm* as well as 'chain'); Hughes, *Church in Early Irish Society*, 46–8. ² See the next chapter. ³ *HE* v.21, written between 706 and 715.

- (2) in the third week of that month;
- (3) on a Sunday;
and
- (4) the paschal full moon must not fall before the vernal equinox.

The first two rules were taken over from Judaism, which remained faithful to the lunar month of twenty-nine and a half days. The fourth is a development of the Judaic rule obtaining in the time of Christ according to which the first month of the year was in the spring. The third rule is naturally purely Christian: just as Islam would be separated from Judaism and Christianity by placing the holy day of the week on a Friday, so Christianity separated itself from Judaism by having its holy day on a Sunday. The issue over Easter was part of the history of sacred time, and, in particular, of the transformation of a pagan calendar into a Christian one. The ordering of time was an even more potent instrument in the development of opposing identities than was variation in the cutting of hair.⁴

The points on which men were divided were, first, the date of the vernal equinox, and, secondly, the permitted 'lunar limits', namely at what 'age' (which day of the lunar month) could the moon be on Easter Sunday. Everyone agreed that Easter Sunday could fall on any day from the sixteenth to the twentieth of the first lunar month of the year. For Bede and Ceolfrith, however, adherents of the Dionysiac or Alexandrian Easter, the equinox was 21 March and the lunar limits were from the fifteenth to the twenty-first days of the lunar month inclusive. For adherents of the 'Celtic' eighty-four-year cycle the vernal equinox was on 25 March and the limits were from the fourteenth to the twentieth inclusive. Victorius of Aquitaine, a sixth-century scholar whose paschal table was long followed by the papacy and by the Frankish Church, is ambiguous on the point. In the introduction to his cycle he says that the 'Latins' were accustomed to begin the first month as early as 5 March so that the fourteenth day of the month became 18 March, well before the Alexandrian, let alone the Celtic, equinox; but he also gives the Alexandrian equinox and his cycle varies between the two.⁵ Victorius' lunar limits in terms of the age of the moon are similarly ambiguous:

⁴ E. James, 'Bede and the Tonsure Question', *Peritia*, 3 (1984), 85–98.

⁵ The year 531 is the only one in the period 500–664 where he follows the *Latini*, though he might have done so in 499, 536, 550 and 570. Victorius of Aquitaine's *Cursus Paschalis* is ed. Th. Mommsen, *Chronica Minora*, i, MGH AA 9 (Berlin, 1892), pp. 667–735; and cf. C. W. Jones, 'The Victorian and Dionysian Paschal Tables in the West', *Speculum*, 9 (1934), 410–13. For the purposes of the seventh century we can take Victorius as agreeing with the Alexandrian equinox – the Easter full moon cannot be before the twenty-first.

the *Latini* reckoned them from the sixteenth to the twenty-second, but he also gives the 'Greek', that is Alexandrian, Easter (the fifteenth to the twenty-first) as an alternative. His capacity to sit unhelpfully on the fence appears to have been one reason why those who followed either the Celtic or the Roman paschal reckonings found his treatment unacceptable.⁶

Men also differed on the definition of what was a day and a month. These differences of definition were less tangible and they explain why many of the arguments failed to come to grips with the other side's views. In its characteristically classroom style, the seventh-century Irish *computus De Ratione Computandi* set out the problems as follows:

We ought to discover how many initial points there are for the natural day. There are four. The Chaldaeans say that the day begins with the rising of the sun, because they used to worship the sun. The Hebrews, however, take their start from midday, because they reckon by the moon; for it is at midday that the [age of] the moon is reckoned to change. The Greeks and the Egyptians, however, think that the beginning of the day coincides with the beginning of night, while the Romans think that the day should both begin and end with midnight, following the statement of Jerome: 'In the middle of the night the world was created, and likewise in the middle of the night it will be destroyed.'⁷

For Bede there is an ordinary day (*dies*) and what we may call a lunar day (*luna*): the lunar day is from sunset to sunset;⁸ the ordinary day in Old Testament had been from sunrise to sunrise, while in the New Testament it was from sunset to sunset.⁹ The combination of these two days was used, as we shall see, in arguments against both the Victorian and 'Celtic' Easters.

The month in question for both the early Christians and their Jewish contemporaries was the lunar month, which began when the new moon first appeared in the sky, in other words after the true date of the new

⁶ Columbanus, *Ep.* i.4; Bede, *De Temporum Ratione*, ed. C. W. Jones, (1) *Beda's Opera de Temporibus* (Cambridge, Mass., 1943), and (2) *Beda's Opera Didascalica*, CCL 123 B (Turnhout, 1977), c. 51.

⁷ *De Ratione Computandi*, c. 26, ed. D. Ó Cróinín in Walsh and Ó Cróinín, *Cummian's Letter De Controversia Paschali and the De Ratione Computandi*, p. 134; Bede's account of these variations, in *De Temporum Ratione*, c. 5, is similar but differs in detail.

⁸ *De Temporum Ratione*, ed. Jones, c. 43: 'haec est specialiter regula tenenda: ut lunae aetatem, non iuxta quosdam a meridiana uel dimidia post meridiem, sed a uespertina potius hora mutari nouerimus'. The reference to 'dimidia post meridiem' may be to Anatolius: see *De Ratione Computandi*, c. 66.

⁹ *De Temporum Ratione*, ed. Jones, c. 5: 'Diuina autem auctoritas, quae in Genesi dies mane usque ad mane computandos esse decreuit, eadem in Euangelio totius diei tempus a uespera inchoari et consummari sanxit in uesperam'; c. 59: 'Nam et iuxta legis edicta semper quarta decima luna primi mensis ad uesperam immolantes et comedentes agni immaculati carnem . . . atque illucescente mane in luna quinta decima mensis eiusdem primum azymorum diem intraremus.'

moon.¹⁰ The lunar month is 29.53 days, and a lunar day (*luna*) is reckoned as beginning at sunset, not at midnight. The effect of beginning the lunar month not with the new moon itself, but with the first appearance of the thin crescent moon in the evening sky, is that the day of the full moon is then the fourteenth day of the lunar month (*luna quarta decima*). If one were to begin with the true new moon the full moon would be 14.76 days later; unless, therefore, the new moon were at the beginning of the day, the full moon would be on the fifteenth, not the fourteenth, day of the lunar month. The notion that the Celtic paschal reckoning permitted an Easter before the full moon was to provide an important argument for its opponents, since they began the month at the true new moon.

The state of affairs in New Testament Judaism had not obtained throughout the period of the Old Testament.¹¹ Before the kingdom of Judah was subjected to the power of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon the basis of the system was quite different:

- (a) the day began not with sunset, but with sunrise;
- (b) the month began not with the first appearance of the crescent moon at sunset, but with the final disappearance of the old moon at dawn;
- (c) the year began not in the spring, but in the autumn.

This early system, at least on points (a) and (b), was the same as that of the Egyptians.¹² The changes thus represent the decline of Egyptian, and the rise of Babylonian, influence in the kingdom of Judah. This is only one example to show that time is a political matter: it is a common attribute of imperial power that it can organise time. Such political control over time requires, however, the development of a luni-solar calendar. It is important to be able to fix the dates of public occasions in advance so that subject peoples may be notified when they should occur. It was not surprising, therefore, that the First Council of Nicaea, summoned by the Emperor Constantine in 425, should concern itself with achieving uniformity in the timing of Easter. If Christianity was to be the religion of the emperor, Christian time should be undisputed. The task was not easy: even the decisions of the Council became subject to divergent interpretation.¹³

¹⁰ R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (London, 1961), p. 183. ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

¹² Seventh- and eighth-century scholars were aware of these problems, even if their information was inaccurate: *De Ratione Computandi*, c. 26; *De Temporum Ratione*, ed. Jones, c. 5.

¹³ See the discussion by Walsh and Ó Cróinín, *Cummian's Letter De Controversia Paschali and the De Ratione Computandi*, p. 190 n. 2; Jones, *Bedae Opera de Temporibus* (Cambridge, Mass., 1943), pp. 17–25 (on later extensions, notably by Dionysius Exiguus, see p. 18 n. 1).

The difficulty is to combine together the year (one revolution of the earth around the sun) and the month (one revolution of the moon around the earth).¹⁴ A year is 365.24 days; twelve lunar months come to 354.37 days. The difference is a little less than eleven days. The solution adopted was not, as with the modern calendar, to make the month into a division of the solar year, thus severing the old connection with the phases of the moon. Instead the plan was to insert, to 'intercalate', extra lunar months at intervals so as to restore the balance between the lunar sequence of months and the solar sequence of years. It was thus the prerogative of political authority to prescribe when the extra months should be intercalated. Only so could the calendar be fixed far in advance and all the festivals of a varied empire be made to occur in accord. Moreover, the accord between the lunar sequence of the months and the solar sequence of years had to be preserved. Months regulated agriculture: one month was the month of sowing, another the month of the barley harvest. But such events as sowing or harvest are dictated by the solar year (modified by the weather). Unless the solar year and the lunar month could be made to march together, the organisation of food production by months would be impossible. Hence not only emperors but peasants required an accord between the sun and the moon.

The mathematics prescribed four possible ways of intercalating the extra months needed to bring the months and the years together. Since the solar year was 12.3683 lunar months, the problem was to cope with the excess of 0.3683 of a lunar month. To do this one might

(a) intercalate 3 months every 8 years ($3/8 = 0.3750$);

(b) intercalate 4 months every 11 years ($4/11 = 0.3636$).

But since (a) exceeds the target and (b) falls short, the natural solution is

(c) to intercalate 7 months every 19 years ($7/19 = 0.3684$).

But an alternative is

(d) to intercalate 31 months in every 84 years ($31/84 = 0.3690$).

It was, therefore, the effort to reconcile the lunar and the solar elements of the calendar for several years in advance, and not just by inserting a month *ad hoc* whenever things seemed out of accord, that produced the various 'cycles'. In the seventh century two principal cycles were in competition, the nineteen-year cycle (based on (c)) and the eighty-four-year cycle (based on (d)).

Cycles are, however, only a small part of the problem. Astronomy was

¹⁴ Jones, *Beda's Opera de Temporibus*, p. 11.

far less important in the controversy than is sometimes supposed. What really mattered was biblical exegesis.¹⁵

(II) EXEGESIS

Easter is a spring festival, tied to the vernal equinox, and also a lunar festival, tied to the date of the full moon. It is therefore necessary to decide what is the date of the vernal equinox and also the relationship between the paschal full moon, the vernal equinox and Easter. In order to understand all this, and much else besides, we need some understanding of the Jewish feasts from which Easter is derived.

Easter is a Christian adaptation of the great Jewish feast of Passover which had been combined, within Judaism itself, with the Feast of Unleavened Bread.¹⁶ Three fundamental texts are as follows:

- (a) Deuteronomy 16:1–6: ¹Observe the month of Abib, and keep the passover unto the LORD thy God: for in the month of Abib the LORD thy God brought thee forth out of Egypt by night. ²Thou shalt therefore sacrifice the passover unto the LORD thy God, of the flock and the herd, in the place that the LORD shall choose to place his name there. ³Thou shalt eat no leavened bread with it; seven days shalt thou eat unleavened bread therewith, *even* the bread of affliction; for thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt in haste: that thou mayest remember the day when thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt all the days of thy life. ⁴And there shall be no leavened bread seen with thee in all thy coast seven days; neither shall there *any thing* of the flesh, which thou sacrificedst the first day at even, remain all night until the morning. ⁵Thou mayest not sacrifice the passover within any of thy gates, which the LORD thy God giveth thee: ⁶But at the place which the LORD thy God shall choose to place his name in, there thou shalt sacrifice the passover at even, at the going down of the sun, at the season that thou camest forth out of Egypt. [Abib was the Canaanite name for Nisan, the first month in the year.]
- (b) Leviticus 23:5–6: ⁵In the fourteenth *day* of the first month at even is the LORD's passover. ⁶And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the feast of unleavened bread unto the LORD: seven days ye must eat unleavened bread.

¹⁵ D. McCarthy, 'The Origins of the *Laterculus* Paschal Cycle of the Insular Celtic Churches', *CMCS*, 28 (Winter 1994), 28–9; the truth of this point is easily demonstrated by reading the letters of Columbanus (*Ep.* i), Cumminian and Ceolfriith. ¹⁶ De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, pp. 484–93.

- (c) Exodus 12:1–3, 6–8, 14–15, 17–18: ¹AND the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, ²This month *shall be* unto you the beginning of months: it *shall be* the first month of the year to you. ³Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth *day* of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of *their* fathers, a lamb for an house . . . ⁶And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening. ⁷And they shall take of the blood, and strike *it* on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it. ⁸And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; *and* with bitter *herbs* they shall eat it . . . ¹⁴And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever. ¹⁵Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread; even the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses: for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel . . . ¹⁷And ye shall observe the feast of unleavened bread; for in this self-same day have I brought your armies out of the land of Egypt: therefore shall ye observe this day in your generations by an ordinance for ever. ¹⁸In the first *month*, on the fourteenth day of the month at even, ye shall eat unleavened bread until the one and twentieth day of the month at even.

There are two distinct feasts in these passages: first, the Passover, celebrated in the night of the fourteenth day of the month, the day of the full moon; secondly, the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Easter is primarily the Passover of the Christians, but it is also attached to the second feast, that of Unleavened Bread. The feasts are, however, combined differently in different texts. In Leviticus the seven days of Unleavened Bread begin on the fifteenth day of the month and extend to include the twenty-first; in Deuteronomy the Feast of Unleavened Bread seems to begin at the same time as the Passover; in Exodus the first day of Unleavened Bread begins on the evening of the fourteenth day – in the Hebrew this is ‘between the two evenings’, in other words at sunset, at the rising of the full moon, and at the point of time at which the fourteenth day of the lunar month gives way to the fifteenth – and the seven days extend as far as the twenty-first ‘at even’, at the end of the twenty-first day.¹⁷ Leviticus

¹⁷ The phrase ‘at even’ corresponds to a Hebrew phrase meaning literally ‘between the two evenings’, the interpretation of which was already a matter of debate for the Talmudic scholars: B. S. Childs, *Exodus: A Commentary* (London, 1974), p. 182.

and Exodus thus include the twenty-first day; Deuteronomy may have excluded it. This difference is crucial, for the 'Celtic' Easter assumes that the seven days of Unleavened Bread began with the fourteenth day, while the Dionysiac–Alexandrian Easter follows Leviticus in beginning the seven days with the fifteenth day.¹⁸

In the Gospels it is clear that Matthew, Mark and Luke began the Feast of Unleavened Bread on the fourteenth day.¹⁹ In other words, the Celtic lunar limits, from the fourteenth to the twentieth days of the lunar month, agreed with the Synoptic Gospels. Their chronology is shown in table 9.1. The identification of Maundy Thursday with both the day of Passover and the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread is one crucial support for the Celtic Easter. Another is the shift in the time at which the paschal lambs were sacrificed. In Exodus, this was at sunset; in Mark it is at the time when Christ sends the disciples to prepare the paschal meal, namely in the afternoon some hours before sunset. This was critical for the different chronology of St John's Gospel, according to which the Jewish feasts were all one day later. For him, Christ – the Lamb and also the New Temple of the New Covenant – died at the time when the lambs were sacrificed in the Temple of the Jews.

The importance of the sacrifice of the lamb for the Celtic Easter is shown by a passage from the Book of Anatolius, an important authority for Columbanus in Burgundy and Colmán in Northumbria. The passage explains, probably on the basis of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, that the apostle John and, following him, the bishops of Asia, celebrated Easter on the fourteenth day of the lunar month, whatever day of the week it might be:

... all the bishops of Asia, who support their rule by the irreproachable authority of John the Evangelist, who leant on Our Lord's bosom, who was without doubt the imbibor of spiritual teachings, celebrated the Pasch in every year when it was the fourteenth day of the lunar month and when the lamb was sacrificed among the Jews, once the equinox was over.²⁰

For those, like Bede, who looked primarily to the Old Testament, to Exodus and Leviticus, for their paschal chronology, the main events began at sunset on the fourteenth day of the month, namely at the tran-

¹⁸ The phrasing of the paschal limits ascribed by Cumman to Patrick closely follows that of Exodus 12:18: *Cumman's Letter*, ed. Walsh and Ó Cróinín, lines 208–10.

¹⁹ Matthew, 26:17; Mark, 14:12; Luke, 22:7.

²⁰ *Liber Anatolii*, ed. B. Krusch, *Studien zur christlich-mittelalterlichen Chronologie: der 84jährige Ostercyclus und seine Quellen* (Leipzig, 1880), p. 321, and tr. in McCarthy, 'The Origins of the *Laterculus Paschal Cycle*', 34–5; cf. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, v.23–5.

Table 9.1. *The chronology of feasts in the Synoptic Gospels*

Day of month	Day of week	Time of day	Event
14	Thursday Passover = first day of Unleavened Bread	Afternoon	Paschal lambs sacrificed in the Temple; disciples go to find and prepare the room for the meal
14–15	Thursday–Friday	Sunset	Christ sits down to eat the paschal meal with the disciples
15	Friday	Night	Gethsemane and trial before Caiaphas
15	Friday	Morning	Trial before Pilate
15	Friday	9 a.m.	Crucifixion
15	Friday	12 midday	Darkness
15	Friday	3 p.m.	Death of Christ
15	Friday	Before sunset	Burial
16	Saturday		Christ in the tomb
17	Sunday	Before sunrise	Resurrection
	Fourth day of Unleavened Bread		
20	Seventh day of Unleavened Bread		

sition to the fifteenth. It was thus natural for them to follow Leviticus and make the lunar limits extend from the fifteenth to the twenty-first. Bede was, however, driven to special pleading in order to cope with the New Testament evidence.²¹ For him, quoting the Patriarch Theophilus, the only thing of importance that happened on the fourteenth was the betrayal by Judas.²²

The paschal dispute stemmed also from the Christian abandonment of the Jewish Passover. The first Christians, being Jews, celebrated Passover just as other Jews did. But there came a decisive break when the Church decided that Easter, the celebration of Christ's resurrection, should always take place on a Sunday.²³ Since the day of the full moon – and hence also the Passover – might be on any day of the week, this entailed a separation of the Christian Easter from the Jewish Passover. Those who continued to resist this change were called Quartodecimans,

²¹ *De Temporum Ratione*, ed. Jones, c. 63: 'Verum quia ipsa quoque dies paschae a fermento castigari praecipitur, hanc Evangelii scriptura aliquando primam azymorum cognominat' (he then quotes Mark 14:12). ²² *Ibid.*, c. 61 (probably incorrectly: see Mark 14:10).

²³ *De Ratione Computandi*, cc. 86–7; *De Temporum Ratione*, ed. Jones, c. 61.

for they continued to celebrate Easter on *quarta decima luna*, ‘the fourteenth day of the lunar month’, whether it was a Sunday or not. But, even if one were not a Quartodeciman, it was not clear whether the break with the Jewish Passover should be so absolute that one should not celebrate Easter on the fourteenth day, even if it were a Sunday. According to some, the condemnation of the Quartodeciman position at the Council of Nicaea in 425 had decreed that Easter was never to be celebrated on the fourteenth day of the lunar month.²⁴ Others thought that the prohibition only forbade celebrating the Resurrection on the day of the Passover when the latter was not a Sunday. This party appealed to the authority of the apostle John.²⁵

Let us suppose that we take the view that one should never celebrate Easter on the day of the Passover. The fifteenth day of the lunar month will then be the earliest date for Easter: in a year when Easter is the fifteenth day of the lunar month, the fourteenth day (and thus the Passover) will occur on a Saturday so that Easter Sunday is the next day. The twenty-first day will be the latest possible lunar date: it assumes that the fourteenth day (and thus the Passover) is on a Sunday so that Easter must be postponed until the next Sunday, the twenty-first day of the lunar month. The consequence of this strategy was to bring about a coincidence between the ‘lunar limits’, 15–21 inclusive, and the seven days of Unleavened Bread according to Leviticus. By loosening the link with one Jewish feast, the Passover, one strengthened the connection with the other, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, as defined by Leviticus.

The other strategy was not so shy of the initial connection with the Jewish Passover. Columbanus, writing to Pope Gregory I, declared, ‘What kind of judgement is this – so frivolous and so uneducated, based upon no texts from Holy Scripture – that “We ought not to celebrate Easter with the Jews”?’²⁶ For Columbanus, if the day of Passover happens to be a Sunday, that day will be Easter. As a consequence the

²⁴ For example, Bede, *HE* ii.19, reports this argument as having been used in 640 by the pope-elect John in his letter to the northern Irish churches, and in iii.25 he reports the same argument as having been used by Wilfrid against Colmán. Their views were based on the fact that the version of Nicaea in the standard canon-law collection of Dionysius Exiguus took this line, although the Council itself did not.

²⁵ Thus Colmán in his opening speech at the Synod of Whitby (Bede, *HE* iii.25), basing himself on the *Liber Anatolii*. on this see McCarthy, ‘The Origins of the *Laterculus Paschal Cycle*’, 34–5; however, I think he goes beyond the evidence in supposing that John’s authority was used against that of Peter (John was well known to have celebrated Passover with the Jews, on the fourteenth day of the lunar month; it was the authority of Peter and Paul that was adduced in favour of celebrating Easter on a Sunday; men such as Columbanus wished to follow Peter and Paul in celebrating on a Sunday, while they followed John to the extent that a Sunday that coincided with the fourteenth day of the lunar month was acceptable).

²⁶ Columbanus, *Ep.* i.4.

lunar limits are now 14–20 inclusive and coincide with the days of Unleavened Bread according to the Synoptic Gospels and possibly Deuteronomy. The first strategy is that of the Dionysiac–Alexandrian Easter, the second that of the ‘Celtic’ Easter.

Easter is both the Christian Passover, when Christ, the lamb of the New Covenant, was sacrificed so that Christians might escape from Egypt, from the land of bondage to sin, and also the celebration of the Resurrection. For those concerned with time these two aspects of the feast were difficult to combine. For the early Christians there was no great problem: for them the Passion and Resurrection of Christ were parts of a single process of salvation, and as the Passion was the Passover of the New Covenant, so the Resurrection was the new escape from Egypt.²⁷ Moreover, the exodus from Egypt began on the very same night of the Passover (Exodus 13:29ff.) when the people of Israel left in such haste that ‘they took their dough before it was leavened’ (Exodus 13:34). The problem began when the Passion and Resurrection were no longer so clearly perceived as a single process. It became more acute when men began to take the New Testament accounts as the overriding criterion of their liturgical practice, for those accounts are, on points of chronology, not consistent.²⁸

The exegesis of Columbanus and other adherents of the Celtic lunar limits (the fourteenth to the twentieth day of the lunar month) seems to have rested on two main supports: first, an interpretation of the Old Testament by which the day of the Passover was also the first of seven days of Unleavened Bread; secondly, an interpretation of the New Testament according to which not only was the Passover the first day of Unleavened Bread, but also both the days of the lunar months and the Jewish feastdays began and ended at sunset (see table g.2). In addition to

²⁷ This may be the reason why St John’s Gospel has a different chronology for the Passion and Resurrection from that employed in the Synoptic Gospels: the Last Supper and the Passion are on the ‘day of Preparation for the Passover’ (19:14); Christ dies as the paschal lambs are being killed in the Temple; he lies in the tomb during the Passover itself; and he rises on the first day of the week. Christ thus passes from death to life, from Egypt to freedom, through the day of Passover. To escape this problem, Augustine interpreted John’s reference to the *Parasceve Paschae* (19:14) as referring not to the Jewish Day of Preparation, but to the day of preparation for the sacrifice of the New Lamb, namely Christ: *De consensu evangelistarum*, iii.13, § 50 (ed. F. Wehrich, CSEL 43, Vienna, 1904, pp. 336–8); *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus CXXIV, Tractatus 117* (ed. R. Willems, CCSL 36, Turnhout, 1954, pp. 651–2).

²⁸ In the Synoptic Gospels, the Last Supper was the Passover meal and Christ was crucified during the daytime portion of the Passover; in John, the Last Supper was not the Passover meal and Christ was crucified at the same time as the paschal lambs were being killed in the Temple, while the Passover coincided with the sabbath and with the day spent by Christ in the tomb: R. H. Lightfoot, *St John’s Gospel*, p. 354.

Table 9.2. *The Celtic reconstruction*

Day of lunar month (<i>luna</i>)	Day of Unleavened Bread	Event
14	1	Disciples find a room; paschal lamb killed
15	2	Last Supper, trial and Crucifixion
16	3	Christ in the tomb
17	4	Resurrection (before dawn)

this understanding of New Testament history, there is a further essential point: there is no attempt made to associate the timing of Easter with the Resurrection in particular beyond placing it on a Sunday. Easter does not have to be, at the earliest, on the seventeenth day of the lunar month simply because Christ's Resurrection was on that day.

In 632 or 633, the Irishman Cummian wrote a letter to Ségéne, the abbot of Iona under whom Aidan was sent as a missionary to Northumbria, and to the hermit Béccán, in which he attacked the Celtic paschal reckoning and argued in favour of that of Victorius of Aquitaine. Part of his argument is as follows:

And so the whole Eastern Church has for long assigned three weeks to the three most sacred feasts of our Lord Jesus Christ, that is, to the Passion, the Burial and the Resurrection: to the Passion the week from the fourteenth day to the twentieth, to the burial from the fifteenth to the twenty-first and to the Resurrection from the sixteenth to the twenty-second. Thus they consecrate the week out of reverence to the Lord. For if the fourteenth day of the month is assigned to the Resurrection (as you assign it), the thirteenth day becomes, by a back-to-front ordering, that of the burial and the twelfth that of the Passion.²⁹

Cummian is here drawing on an earlier source to defend the Victorian lunar limits (16–22) as against those adhered to by the abbot of Iona (14–20); but his chronology for the New Testament events was not that assumed by Columbanus or Ségéne.

The exegesis of Cummian is based even more on the New Testament than on the Old. In particular, the reasoning behind the lunar limits adopted from Victorius of Aquitaine is based on an interpretation of the Synoptic Gospels in which their chronology becomes crucial in a novel way. The essence of it is stated in the so-called Cologne Prologue (a probable source for Cummian):

²⁹ Cummian, *Letter*, lines 66–8.

Table 9.3. *Cummian's reconstruction*¹

	Feria	Luna	Feast	Event
Thursday evening	5	14	Passover	Last Supper: Matt. 26:17
Friday morning	6	14	Preparation	Matt. 27:1
Saturday morning	7	15	Sabbath	Matt. 27:62–6
Sunday morning	1	16		Resurrection

Notes:

[The day of the lunar month, *luna*, changes at midday; the day of the week, *feria*, changes at midnight.]

¹ Cummian, *Letter*, ed. Walsh and Ó Cróinín, lines 59–73.

This observance is to be celebrated by us . . . so that these three most sacred days . . . the Passion, the rest [in the tomb] and the Resurrection should have their own particular weeks of the lunar month ascribed to them: the Passion from the fourteenth day of the lunar month to the twentieth, the rest from the fifteenth . . . to the twenty-first; the Resurrection . . . from the sixteenth to the twenty-second.³⁰

The implications may be set out in tabular form on the assumption (not shared by the Cologne Prologue) that Cummian's day was divided between a lunar day, beginning and ending at midday, and a day of the week beginning and ending at midnight (see table 9.3).³¹ Some such distinction is implied by the careful way in which Cummian puts the meeting of the chief priests of Matthew 27:1 in the morning of the sixth day of the week.³² The Resurrection is now on the sixteenth day of the month, not on the seventeenth, as it would have been for Columbanus. Moreover, that date is then taken to fix the initial lunar limit – the earliest day in the lunar month when Easter can occur – and thus to prescribe an Easter falling between the sixteenth and the twenty-second day (inclusive) of the lunar month. The consequence, however, of the use made by Cummian of this reconstruction is a detachment of the feast of Easter from the Jewish Passover: Good Friday is now the Christian

³⁰ Krusch, *Studien zur christlich-mittelalterlichen Chronologie*, pp. 232–3 (§ 8): 'Cuius observantia perenni voto per singulos dies vicibus congruis a nobis caelebranda, hoc ordine sive dispositione, ut hii tres dies sacratismi, qui trinitatis gratia sanctificati sunt, passio, requies et resurrectio habeant singulas sibi adscriptas lunae ebdomadas: passio a xiiii. luna usque ad xxm^m, requies a xv. luna, in qua azema, usque as xxi, resurrectio, novi firmenti ingressio, a xvi. luna usque ad xxii.'

³¹ As in a text probably from the circle of Cummian, the *De Ratione Computandi*, ed. Ó Cróinín, c. 26, 'In meridie enim aetas lunae motari putatur', while the Romans are said to follow the authority of Jerome in beginning and ending the day at midnight.

³² Cummian, *Letter*, ed. Walsh and Ó Cróinín, lines 69–70.

Table 9.4. *Bede's exegesis*

Day of month <i>luna</i> , sunset to sunset	Feast day sunset to sunset	New Testament events
14	Passover	Disciples find room for Passover meal
15	First day of Unleavened Bread	Last Supper begins at sunset; Crucifixion and burial (before sunset)
16	Second day of Unleavened Bread	Christ in the tomb
17	Third day of Unleavened Bread	Resurrection
21	Seventh day of Unleavened Bread	

Passover, not Easter Sunday.³³ A further consequence is to detach the lunar limits from the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for even in the version given by Leviticus that feast extended no further than the twenty-first day (inclusive). Columbanus seized on the weakness that the lunar limits of Victorius (16–22) allowed Easter to be celebrated after the beginning of the third quarter of the lunar month; the moon now rose after midnight and would thus have waned to the point when less than half of its surface was illuminated. He quoted Anatolius:

Certainly if the moon's rising has been delayed until the end of two watches of the night, which marks midnight, light does not prevail over darkness but darkness over light; but it is without doubt impossible that, at Easter, any element of darkness should dominate the light, since the festival of the Lord's Resurrection is light, and 'light has no communion with darkness' [cf. 2 Corinthians 6:14].³⁴

An exegesis based upon the metaphor of light (central to the Easter liturgy) would, however, be used against, as well as in favour of, the Celtic Easter.

According to Bede, the Old Testament day began and ended at sunrise, while that of the New Testament began and ended at sunset. Throughout their history, however, the Jews, according to Bede, began and ended their feasts at sunset, not at sunrise. In the Old Testament, there was a difference between feastday and ordinary day; in the New Testament both were the same (see table 9.4). The reconstruction of New Testament history does not differ from that of Columbanus, except on the one crucial point of the days of Unleavened Bread: since the

³³ Contrast the old Easter liturgy: 'Haec sunt enim festa paschalia, in quibus verus ille Agnus occiditur, cuius sanguinis postes fidelium consecrantur.'

³⁴ Columbanus, *Ep.* i.3 (my tr.)

fifteenth was now the first day of Unleavened Bread, the seven days of the entire feast could now suggest lunar limits between the fifteenth and the twenty-first. This interpretation, however, came from Leviticus; the text of Matthew 26:17 told heavily in favour of the Celtic interpretation. In addition, the exegesis of that verse by Jerome, in his authoritative commentary on Matthew, confirmed the identity of the Passover and the first day of Unleavened Bread.³⁵

In terms of the exegesis of scripture each of the contending theories had its weak and its strong points. It was Bede's merit that he came very close to one central issue: the definition of a day. He knew that the Jewish feasts began at sunset, but he did not realise that in some texts this is also true of the day itself. For Bede, the Jews remained faithful to their earlier conception of the day as beginning with sunrise. Yet he is curious about the anomaly.³⁶ He appears to have been less perceptive on the definition of the month. It was only because the month began with the first appearance of the crescent moon that the fourteenth day could be the day of the full moon. But at this point Bede's superior mathematics and astronomy inhibited his historical understanding. Bede's month began with the true new moon. As a consequence it was normally only with the fifteenth day that his moon reached the full. This is one reason why, for him, the rule that Easter could be as early as the fourteenth day was unacceptable: the fourteenth day 'belongs to the shadows' before the full moon.³⁷ Like the Jewish Passover it prefigures, but is not identical with, the Christian feast, the true paschal sacrifice. A shift to the true new moon as the beginning of the month thus conveniently allows a combination of a typological interpretation of the Jewish Passover with a symbolical interpretation of the phases of the moon (everything before the fullness of the light – Christ – belongs to the Old Testament era).

(III) THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONTROVERSY

It has been usual to suppose that the Churches of Ireland and Britain remained in uncontroversial isolation, faithful to an outmoded Roman paschal cycle, the 'older *Supputatio Romana*', until the impact of

³⁵ Jerome, *Commentariorum in Matheum Libri IV*, iv (ed. D. Hurst and M. Adriaen, CCL 77, Turnhout, 1969), p. 248: 'Prima azymorum quarta decima dies mensis primi est, quando agnus immolatur et luna plenissima est et fermentum abicitur'. Cf. Bede, *In Lucae Euangelium Expositio*, on Luke 22:7–8 (ed. D. Hurst, CCL 70, Turnhout, 1960, p. 375): 'Qui licet die sequente, hoc est quinta decima sit luna crucifixus, haec tamen nocte qua agnus imolebatur et carnis et sanguinisque suis discipulis tradidit mysteria celebranda et a Iudaeis tentus ac ligatus ipsius immolationis, hoc est passionis suae, sacrauit exordium.'

³⁶ See the last sentence of *De Temporum Ratione*, c. 5.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, c. 59, from the Prologue of Theophilus ('maxime cum et lumen ipsius lunae imperfectum adhuc in proprio globo esse uideatur'); *Hib.* xx.6.

Columbanus in Francia and the Gregorian mission to Britain restored links with the continent and thus rendered paschal eccentricity obvious. The latter part of this view remains true: it was indeed Columbanus, above all, who made the Easter of the Irish and British Churches into an issue of major importance. From then on, the Irish could not escape the fatal charge that, in Cummian's words, those faithful to the eighty-four-year cycle were 'an insignificant group of Britons and Irish who are almost at the end of the world, and, if I may say so, but pimples on the face of the earth'.³⁸ But the notion of an earlier isolation cannot be sustained. For Cummian in 632/3, the earliest paschal reckoning current in Ireland was that of 'our *papa*, St Patrick'.³⁹ It has been strongly argued that this was in fact the cycle of Palladius rather than Patrick.⁴⁰ As for the eighty-four-year cycle, it now seems likely that it was set out by Sulpicius Severus and prevailed in Ireland and Britain partly through the prestige of St Martin of Tours.⁴¹ Moreover, a MS copy of the eighty-four-year cycle has been discovered which makes it much easier to reconstruct its workings.⁴² Columbanus' letter to Gregory the Great imply that Irish computists, working in Ireland, knew of Victorius of Aquitaine but disliked what they knew.⁴³ Apart from the exegetical objections, there was the difficulty that Victorius gave both 'Latin' limits (16–22) and 'Greek' limits (15–21), as well as two different dates after which the Easter full moon might occur. This was very convenient for the papacy, for which Victorius produced his cycle, in that it enabled it to prefer one date rather than another for pragmatic, *ad hoc* reasons, to be more 'Latin' or more 'Greek' when it seemed politic. But what was useful flexibility for the papacy was exasperating inconsistency for distant provinces, which needed a paschal cycle offering definite results. The Frankish Church, closer to Rome, prescribed adherence to Victorius in 541.⁴⁴ The British and Irish Churches appear to have settled on Sulpicius Severus' eighty-

³⁸ Cummian, *Letter*, lines 109–10.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, lines 208–9. The lunar limits given for this cycle are from the fourteenth to the twenty-first, which appears to be untenable since an eight-day period would not determine whether the fourteenth or the twenty-first was to be Easter. It may, however, simply be repeating Exodus 12:18, where 'the 14th at evening' is the dividing point between the fourteenth and the fifteenth, in which case it would agree with the Alexandrian limits.

⁴⁰ D. Ó Cróinín, 'New Light on Palladius', *Peritia*, 5 (1986), 276–83; a more sceptical line is taken by D. N. Dumville, 'Bishop Palladius's Computus?', in Dumville *et al.*, *St Patrick, AD 493–1993*, 85–8.

⁴¹ McCarthy, 'The Origins of the *Laterculus Paschal Cycle*', 37–44.

⁴² D. McCarthy and D. Ó Cróinín, 'The "Lost" Irish 84-Year Easter Table Rediscovered', *Peritia*, 6–7 (1987–8), 227–42 (it is, of course, not necessarily Irish rather than British, but that was an understandable slip on the part of the authors); D. McCarthy, 'Easter Principles and a Lunar Cycle used by Fifth-Century Christian Communities in the British Isles', *Journal for the History of Astronomy*, 24 (1993), 204–24.

⁴³ Columbanus, *Ep.* i.3.

⁴⁴ Orléans, 541, c. 1, *Concilia Galliae, A. 511 – A. 695*, ed. de Clercq, p. 132.

four-year cycle before the Irish Church became separate from the British, very roughly about 500, and therefore before the Frankish Church decided in favour of Victorius. It was thus the latter decision, that of the Frankish Church, which produced a clear-cut opposition between Insular and continental practice.

By the beginning of the seventh century there were three rival systems still commanding practical allegiance. Cumman knew that there had been others, but they do not seem to have remained in competition.⁴⁵ Two, that of Victorius of Aquitaine and the Dionysiac-Alexandrian (henceforth, for convenience, simply Dionysiac) used a nineteen-year cycle, but they differed on more important points than their agreement on the length of the cycle.⁴⁶ The third was the 'Celtic' eighty-four-year cycle. Use of the term 'Celtic' should, however, be interpreted with due reservation, since for much of the seventh century it had been abandoned by many of the Irish, and also because it is not Celtic in origin: if it was created by Sulpicius Severus, it came to Britain and then Ireland from Gaul in the fifth century.⁴⁷ The crucial differences were the following:

- (1) When was the date of the vernal equinox and therefore how early in the Julian year could the paschal month begin? For Dionysius the beginning of the paschal month was between 8 March and 5 April; for the eighty-four-year cycle between 12 March and 9 April. The limits for the fourteenth day were thus also different: for Victorius and for Dionysius they were between 21 March and 18 April (excluding Victorius' variant 'Latin' usage); for the eighty-four-year cycle the fourteenth day could occur between 25 March and 22 April.
- (2) The calculation of the age of the moon: the Victorian age of the moon for a given day was frequently, but not always, the Dionysiac + 1 (e.g. the seventeenth as against sixteenth). The reason for this was that the nineteen-year cycle was not a complete answer to the problem of getting the lunar and solar calendars into accord. As a result it was necessary to make the moon skip a day once in every nineteen years (the so-called 'leap of the moon', *saltus lunae*). The Dionysiac cycle did this in between each period of nineteen years; Victorius did it in the sixth year. For the first six years of each cycle

⁴⁵ Cumman, *Letter*, lines 208–15.

⁴⁶ McCarthy, 'The Origins of the *Laterculus Paschal Cycle*', 28, points out that neither Cumman nor Bede were especially interested in the difference between cycles of nineteen and eighty-four years; Anatolius, a major authority for the Celtic Easter, used a cycle of nineteen years.

⁴⁷ McCarthy, *ibid.*, 38–44, makes the very attractive suggestion that it was the creation of Sulpicius Severus, who wrote the *Life of St Martin*.

the age of the moon at Easter is the same in the Victorian and Dionysiac tables; in the last thirteen years the Victorian age of the moon is one day in excess of the Dionysiac.

- (3) The lunar limits were different: given that one had decided which was the paschal month, the question arose as to when in that month Easter could occur. For the eighty-four-year cycle it was between the fourteenth and twentieth days of the lunar month; for the Dionysiac between the fifteenth and the twenty-first; for the Victorian between the sixteenth and the twenty-second.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the crucial development which brought about the paschal controversy of the seventh century was the establishment of the Columbanian monasteries in Francia and Italy beginning in the last decade of the sixth century. Even before his time there had been controversy between adherents of the Victorian and eighty-four-year cycles, but the closer contacts between Ireland and the continent initiated by him were to prove crucial in sharpening the debate.⁴⁸

At the risk of oversimplification, we may distinguish four phases in the development of the controversy from 591 to 716.

The first phase was continental and Columbanian.⁴⁹ The growing importance of Columbanus in Francia led to controversy between him and the Frankish bishops which had come to a head by 602/3. That this controversy had its effect on the attitude of Canterbury is shown by the letter of Laurence and his companions. After Columbanus' death in 615, and probably *c.* 627, his monasteries abandoned the eighty-four-year cycle; those in Francia, at least, went over to the Victorian system.

In the second phase, the dispute moved to Ireland. In the second quarter of the seventh century pressure from the continent brought about the adherence of southern Ireland first to the Victorian, and then to the Dionysiac (Alexandrian) Easter. The immediate cause of change appears to have been papal intervention occasioned by relations between Rome and Bobbio.⁵⁰ About 628 Honorius I sent a letter to the Irish which Bede mentions.⁵¹ The effect of this was to cause a number of Irish churches to adopt the Victorian Easter; after a year it was decided to hold a synod at Mag Léne (*c.* 629–30) which decided in favour of what it took to be the universal custom of the Church – universal, that is, apart from the Britons and the Irish.⁵² One leading participant in the

⁴⁸ Columbanus, *Ep.* i, shows that, in his opinion, Irish computists had already found much to criticise in Victorius before the troubles with the Burgundian bishops.

⁴⁹ See above, pp. 358–9. ⁵⁰ Above, pp. 364–7. ⁵¹ *HE* ii.19.

⁵² Cummean, *Letter*, lines 259–70.

Table 9.5. *The Victorian and Dionysiac cycles compared*

	Date of Easter	Age of moon at Easter
Victorius		
Latin	8 April	22nd day
Greek	1 April	15th day
Dionysiac	8 April	21st day

synod, however, subsequently refused to accept the change, whereupon the Irish sent a delegation to Rome which returned to Ireland *c.* 632 and confirmed that the eighty-four-year cycle was rejected by all. After their return Cummián sent a letter to Ségéne, abbot of Iona, and the hermit Béccán, arguing in favour of the Victorian Easter as if it were the custom prevalent not only among the Franks but in Rome itself. By 640, however, Rome had definitely gone over to the Dionysiac Easter, for the letter of the pope-elect John, reported by Bede, is an attack on a proposed *ad hoc* and temporary reconciliation between the Victorian and Celtic Easters, as has been shown by Ó Cróinín.⁵³ The problem arose from a particular difficulty which was to arise in 641, as indicated by data from the Victorian cycle and the Dionysiac one adopted by Bede (see table 9.5; Victorius sometimes gave 'Greek' dates from an earlier Alexandrian cycle together with 'Latin' dates corresponding to usage at Rome). The problem here is that the reckoning of the age of the moon was different by one crucial day: this is why the 'Latin' date in Victorius is the twenty-second while the Dionysiac one is the twenty-first. It appears as though some of the Irish had proposed to follow the 'Greek' date in Victorius' cycle. The consequence was that, when translated into Dionysiac terms, it appeared as if they were proposing to celebrate Easter on the fourteenth day of the month in accordance with the lunar limits of the eighty-four-year cycle, namely between the fourteenth and the twentieth days of the month. Evidence which has been ascribed to the circle of Cummián and to the 650s suggests that the letter of the pope-elect was successful in inducing some at least of the Irish to go over to the Dionysiac Easter.⁵⁴

In the third phase, the dispute spread to England. Partly because of

⁵³ *HE* ii.19; Ó Cróinín, '“New Heresy for Old”', 512–15; and cf. K. Harrison, 'A Letter from Rome to the Irish Clergy, AD 640', *Peritia*, 3 (1984), 222–9.

⁵⁴ D. Ó Cróinín, 'A Seventh-Century Irish Computus from the Circle of Cummián', *PRIA*, 82 c (1982), 405–30.

earlier changes in Ireland and partly because of growing ties between England and the continent, especially with Columbanian monasteries in Francia, pressure began to mount on those churches in England which were subject to Iona and therefore still adherents of the eighty-four-year cycle.⁵⁵ This pressure is exemplified by Wilfrid, who learnt the detailed calculation involved in the Dionysiac Easter when he was in Rome in 654, and by the Irishman Rónán, the adversary of Finán, the Irish bishop of the Northumbrians.⁵⁶ These pressures were triumphant at the Synod of Whitby, which marked not so much the decline of Irish influence in England as the end of the authority exercised by Iona over the Northumbrian Church and its offshoots.⁵⁷ With the arrival of Theodore as archbishop of Canterbury – or rather, as contemporaries perceived it, archbishop of Britain – the English Church acquired a single leader who believed the Hibernians and the Britons to be heretics and schismatics.⁵⁸

The final phase in the controversy to concern the Irish was the conversion of most of the northern half of Ireland, and then of Iona and its Irish and Pictish dependencies, to the Dionysiac Easter. Adomnán, abbot of Iona, twice visited Northumbria (686/7 and 688/9).⁵⁹ On one of these visits he was convinced of the superiority of the Dionysiac Easter, probably partly at least by Bede's own abbot, Ceolfrith.⁶⁰ According to Bede's account, Adomnán was unable to convince the community on Iona, but on a subsequent visit to Ireland he succeeded in persuading almost all of the Irish who had still remained faithful to the eighty-four-year cycle, apart from those subject to the community of Iona; he also brought over some Britons, presumably those of Strathclyde.⁶¹ Between 706 and 715 Ceolfrith persuaded the Pictish king Nechtan to abandon the eighty-four-year cycle and in 716 Iona itself was converted by the English *peregrinus* Ecgbert.⁶² Only some of the Britons now remained faithful to the eighty-four-year cycle.

⁵⁵ For example, Felix, 'de Burgundionum partibus', Bede, *HE* ii.15; Agilbert, a Frank who was to be buried at the Columbanian monastery of Jouarre near Paris, but who had spent 'a considerable time in Ireland for the sake of studying the Holy Scriptures' before he became bishop of the West Saxons, *ibid.*, iii.7; Fursu, probably from Louth (see above, p. 318 n. 177), active first in East Anglia and then in Francia, *ibid.*, iii.19; Hild, encouraged in her monastic vocation by Aidan, wished to go to Francia, *ibid.*, iv.23/21, as others had done, *ibid.*, iii.8.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, iii.25; v. 19; Stephen, *Vita S. Wilfridi*, cc. 5, 10.

⁵⁷ On possible political complications, see Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity*, pp. 107–8; 664 was the end of the *episcopatus Scottorum* among the English (*in provincia Anglorum*): Bede, *HE* iii.26.

⁵⁸ Theodore, Penitential (in the version compiled by the *discipulus Umbrensius*), ii.ix.1–3, ed. Finsterwalder, *Die Canones Theodori und ihrer Überlieferungsformen* (Weimar, 1929), pp. 323–4; tr. J. T. McNeill and H. Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance* (New York, 1938), pp. 206–7.

⁵⁹ Adomnán, *VSC* ii.46; AU 687.5; AT 689.

⁶⁰ Bede, *HE* v.15.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, v.15; for a discussion of this account see below, pp. 436–7.

⁶² *Ibid.*, v.21, 22.

In the first half of the seventh century, therefore, the dominant influence on the controversy was the growth of links between the British Isles and the continent created principally by the career of Columbanus: it was this which fuelled the controversy and led churchmen to seek uniformity via an appeal to the authority of Rome. Exegesis on its own, for reasons that we have seen, was never going to settle the issue: the Bible was simply not consistent enough to yield a solution that was clearly correct. An appeal to authority was therefore necessary to achieve a uniformity that had been accepted by most as requisite ever since the early fourth century.⁶³ Though the pope had not, in general, been anxious to involve himself too closely in the dangerously technical field of paschal computistics, the authority of Rome was sought from an early stage and was eventually decisive in the West.⁶⁴ The Churches of the continent were not as uniform as Irishmen such as Cummián or Englishmen such as Wilfrid believed, but the pressure for greater uniformity was there, and Rome was eventually induced to respond, at first in favour of the Victorian Easter, but then in favour of the Dionysiac. In the second half of the seventh century there was enough momentum in favour of this Roman ruling within the British Isles for it to be impossible, in the end, to resist the Dionysiac Easter. Nonetheless it was a slow process, partly because of the influence and the high repute of Iona, but also because there were excellent arguments in favour of the Celtic Easter

(IV) THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE ISSUES

On the face of things, the paschal question appears to be an issue for astronomers rather than theologians, but as a consideration of the scriptural texts has already shown, this is misleading. Crucial questions had been involved ever since the condemnation of the Quartodecimans; as time went on, those who involved themselves in the controversy showed a remarkable ability to extend yet further the range of issues deemed relevant. The issue of Easter stemmed in the first place from the sense of separate identity of the Christian Church. In the letter of Ceolfrið to the Pictish king Nechtan there is a particularly revealing passage:

If the Lord's day had always fallen on the fifteenth day of the first month, that is, on the fifteenth moon, we could always have celebrated the Passover at

⁶³ Council of Arles, 314, c. 1 (ed. C. Munier, *Concilia Galliae, 314–506*, CCSL 148, p. 9): 'Primo in loco de observatione Paschae dominicae: Vt uno die et uno tempore per omnem orbem a nobis obseruaretur.'

⁶⁴ The Council of Arles, c. 1, continues (addressing itself to Pope Silvester): 'ut iuxta consuetudinem litteras ad omnes tu diriges'.

the very same time as the ancient people of God: and although the nature of the sacrament is different, yet it would have been with one and the same faith.⁶⁵

According to the letter a difference of sacrament (and presumably even belief) would not make Judaism and Christianity different in faith; but a difference in the date of the supreme feast could, and did. The observation is startling, and yet perceptive. The issue is that of the Quartodecimans, those among the early Christians who wished to keep Easter at the time of the Jewish Passover. The Acts of the Apostles show clearly that the earliest Jewish Christians did not consider themselves any the less Jews because they were Christian. It was only natural that they should continue to observe such Jewish feasts as that of the Passover or the Feast of Tents (Pentecost). Yet the decision that Gentile Christians did not have to become Jews by circumcision implied a separation between Judaism and Christianity, and this led to the separation of their chief feasts: Easter was to be distinct from the Passover.

Secondly, the issue of Easter turned on the question of authority in the Church. Oswiu's decision at Whitby to follow Peter was typical.⁶⁶ The Irish Church, just like the English, was proud to claim that it had received the faith from Rome; yet it also claimed, on the basis of the *Liber Anatoli*, that in maintaining that Easter might be celebrated on the fourteenth day of the lunar month, its paschal practice derived from the apostle John.⁶⁷ Orthodoxy implied the preservation of the faith as it had been handed down from the apostles, but which was it to be, John or Peter? This was a weakness in the position adopted by Columbanus and other Irish adherents of the Celtic Easter: the authority they claimed for their paschal practice was not the one they claimed, via Palladius, for their faith in general. Again, the appeal to the authority of the apostle John had another, more serious weakness: any reader of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* would have known that the Quartodecimans appealed to John's authority, on the grounds that he celebrated the pasch on the fourteenth day of the first lunar month whatever day of the week it might be.⁶⁸ Only if paschal observance were a matter of local preference, rather than of uniformity throughout the whole Church, could the Celtic Easter endure; local variety was to be supported by their argument that, because the fourteenth day of the lunar month had the authority of an apostle, namely John, their practice was apostolic and so

⁶⁵ Bede, *HE* v.21. ⁶⁶ Bede, *HE* iii.25; Stephen, *Vita Wilfridi*, c. 10.

⁶⁷ Bede, *HE* iii.25; above, p. 398.

⁶⁸ In Bede, (*ibid.*), Wilfrid points this out in answer to Colmán.

could not be schismatic. Not surprisingly it is on the necessity of uniformity that Cummian, Wilfrid and Bede insist.⁶⁹ Moreover, the same principle of uniformity was often applied to matters of liturgical practice. As Pope Innocent I wrote in 416:

If the priests of the Lord really wished to preserve ecclesiastical uses intact, as received from the Holy Apostles, no diversity and no variation would be found in ritual and ceremonial . . . ; it is proper for them [sc. the Churches of the West] to follow what the Roman Church observes, from which without doubt they took their own beginning.⁷⁰

In this passage the principle behind orthodoxy in belief and uniformity in ritual is the same.⁷¹

The great exception to this general trend was Gregory the Great, the apostle of the English. It is indeed a paradox that Bede is at his least Gregorian when he is arguing the case for a uniformity in the liturgical calendar in obedience to Rome.⁷² For Gregory 'whereas there is a single faith, the customs of churches are diverse'.⁷³ He was even happy to admit that the Church of Rome could adopt the practices of others. Yet Gregory was the exception, and Cummian and Bede represented the normal view. The desire for uniformity in the image of Rome was to grow in strength so that it came to underlie much of the Carolingian Renaissance.

Thirdly, the issue of Easter turned on arguments from scripture. Here too the same authority was cited for liturgical custom as for matters of theological belief. As a result it was thought that a refusal to uphold the custom sanctioned by scripture betrayed the very same attitude that lay behind doctrinal heresy. Yet in fact, the Bible contained inconsistent elements which made it extremely hard to demonstrate a firm scriptural basis for paschal observance. As we have seen, the issue between the Victorian and the Dionysiac Easter turned in part on the definition of a day: for Cummian the lunar day was from midday to midday, for Bede the ordinary day was from sunrise to sunrise, whereas the 'lunar day' was

⁶⁹ Cummian, *De Controversia Paschali*, ed. Walsh and Ó Cróinín, lines 86–120; Stephen, *Vita Wilfridi*, c. 10; Bede, *HE* iii.25.

⁷⁰ Innocent I, *Ep.* 25, § 2 (to Decentius, bishop of Gubbio, 19 March 416), *PL* 20, col. 552; cf. *Ep.* 2 (to Victricius, bishop of Rouen), *ibid.*, col. 470.

⁷¹ The attitude is echoed in the *Vita Prima S. Brigitae*, tr. Connolly, c. 90, which implies that the churches of St Brigit were proud to claim that their mass-books were not just Roman, but were even in line with the very latest Roman practice.

⁷² P. Meyvaert, 'Diversity within Unity: A Gregorian Theme', *Heythrop Journal*, 4 (1963), 141–62, repr. in his *Benedict, Gregory, Bede and Others* (London, 1977), ch. 6.

⁷³ Meyvaert, 'Diversity within Unity', 144, gives the text, which is corruptly transmitted by Bede, *HE* i.27 (no. 11); Meyvaert also gives reason to think that the wording is Gregory's.

from sunset to sunset. The lunar day preceded the solar day, as is shown by the following passage from the letter of Ceolfrith:

It is very clear that in the Paschal observance, though mention is made of the fourteenth day, yet it is not commanded that the Passover should be kept on that day; but it is commanded that the lamb should be sacrificed on the evening of the fourteenth day (*quarta decima dies*), that is on the fifteenth day of the moon (*quinta decima luna*), which is the beginning of the third week, when the moon appears in the sky.⁷⁴

Luna is here the lunar day, from sunset to sunset, while *dies* is the ordinary day, from sunrise to sunrise. The evening of the fourteenth *dies* is thus the beginning of the fifteenth *luna*. In terms of exegesis, the *luna* reflects one kind of biblical day, the *dies* another. Yet – and this is the fallacy – the two kinds of day are not used in one and the same biblical text: if a text belongs to the earlier stratum and has not been revised, its day will be sunrise to sunrise; otherwise it will be sunset to sunset.

This point was crucial in an argument of Ceolfrith's letter against the eighty-four-year cycle:

For those who believe that Easter Sunday is to be observed on the fourteenth day (*luna*) of the first month until the twentieth day of the moon (*luna*) anticipate without any convincing reason the time prescribed in the law; for when they begin to celebrate the vigils of the holy night from the evening of the thirteenth day (*dies*), it is clear that they make that day (*dies*) the beginning of their Easter, and they can find no mention of this in the commandment of the law.

The start of the Easter liturgy was, and is, on the evening of Holy Saturday. If a day stretches from sunrise to sunrise, and Easter Sunday is the fourteenth day of the first month, the liturgy will begin on the thirteenth, and that, Ceolfrith argues, is unscriptural.

As exegesis these passages can hardly have convinced many opponents, for the latter, with good reason, regarded the biblical day as beginning at sunset. Indeed, Bede himself knew that the events of the Passion and Resurrection as told in the New Testament implied a day (*dies*) stretching from sunset to sunset.⁷⁵ But there was a good reason for Ceolfrith's interpretation: as we have seen, better astronomy was the cause of worse exegesis. In the later parts of the Old Testament, at least, the day began at sunset and the month began when the first crescent moon was seen at sunset: the beginnings of month and day were in harmony. For Bede, however, the month begins at the true new moon, that is, when the moon is in conjunction with the sun. Thus whereas the

⁷⁴ Bede, *HE* v.21.

⁷⁵ *De Temporum Ratione*, ed. Jones, c. 5.

biblical full moon could be assigned to the night of the fourteenth day, Bede's full moon was later, on the night of the fifteenth *luna*. The fourteenth was too early: 'it belonged to the shadows', not only because it seemed to agree with the Jews, but because it anticipated the full moon, and therefore, with the Jews, prefigured the true Christian Passover. On this basis, even if the Irish and Britons were not Quartodecimans *secundum litteram*, they were so in spirit.

The exegete tried, more or less strenuously, to establish the literal meaning of the biblical text. He was also expected to interpret it symbolically. It was in this way that the Pelagian heresy became entangled with the Easter question. If one celebrated Easter before the equinox, that, argued Ceolfrith, was tantamount to a claim that 'men can be saved without the grace of Christ coming to them first and . . . that they could have attained to perfect righteousness even though the true Light had never conquered the darkness of the world by dying and rising again'.⁷⁶ At the equinox the day becomes longer than the night and thus the light prevails over darkness. As the sun at the equinox set and rose again to defeat the darkness, so did Christ die, lie in the tomb, and rise again to defeat the Devil. To celebrate Easter before the equinox was to deny the grace of Christ, to suppose that one might defeat the Devil before the True Light had risen. Similarly, to celebrate Easter before the full moon (now accepted to be on the fifteenth *luna*) was to betray oneself as a Pelagian. In the letter of the pope-elect John this exegesis had already, in 640, acquired the authority of Rome. It is alluded to in the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*.⁷⁷

The trouble with the Easter controversy was that it became increasingly serious the more men reflected on the issues: the more they did so the more they saw unacceptable implications and corollaries in views and practices to which they were opposed. They were accustomed to perceiving symbolical meanings in scriptural events, and this intellectual skill deepened the dispute until local tradition could no longer endure. The liturgical tolerance advocated by Gregory the Great was impossible by the second half of the seventh century.

⁷⁶ Letter of Ceolfrith in Bede, *HE* v.21; Letter of the pope-elect John in Bede, *HE* ii.19; on a passage omitted by Bede, see D. Ó Cróinín, 'A Seventh-Century Irish Computus from the Circle of Cumman', *PRLA*, 82 c (1982), 409, and, for the Pelagian accusation, his '“New Heresy for Old”', 515–16. ⁷⁷ *Hib.* xx.6.

CHAPTER TEN

The primatial claims of Armagh, Kildare and Canterbury

(1) BISHOPS, METROPOLITANS AND ARCHBISHOPS

In his *Life of Brigit*, written approximately in the third quarter of the seventh century, Cogitosus claimed that Kildare was an archiepiscopal see with an authority over other Irish bishops;¹ in the *Book of the Angel* the same claim was made on behalf of Armagh.² These claims raise fundamental questions about the organisation of the Irish Church at the highest level, in that they imply that one church could claim an authority over the whole of Ireland.³ The problems, however, are not confined to Ireland. In Stephen's *Life of Wilfrid* we are told that, at a papal synod held in 680, Wilfrid 'confessed the true and catholic faith for all the northern part of Britain and Ireland, and for the islands which were settled by the peoples of the English and the Britons and also of the Irish and the Picts'.⁴ As bishop of York, he had exercised authority over much of the northern half of Britain; what is striking is that he asserted his right to speak for northern Ireland as well. This claim ran counter to those advanced by both Kildare and Armagh. If the bishop of York had the authority to give a solemn profession of faith on behalf not only of Dál Riata (which included Iona, and over which kings of Northumbria were said by Bede to have exercised authority),⁵ but also over part of the mainland of Ireland, neither Kildare nor Armagh could enjoy a primacy throughout Ireland. An implication, however, of their archiepiscopal claims was that they, and not Wilfrid, spoke for Ireland. We need, therefore, to ask what was the basis of Wilfrid's claim to an ecclesiastical

¹ Cogitosus, *Vita Brigidae*, Prologue (AASS Feb. i.135).

² *Liber Angeli*, § 28, ed. L. Bieler, *The Patrician Texts from the Book of Armagh*, p. 188.

³ On the issue of the archbishopric of Armagh, I take my starting-point from Sharpe, 'Armagh and Rome in the Seventh Century', in Ni Chatháin and Richter (eds.), *Irland und Europa*, 58–72.

⁴ Stephanus, *Vita S. Wilfridi*, ed. B. Colgrave, *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus* (Cambridge, 1927), or ed. W. Levison, MGH SRM vi (Hanover, 1913), c. 53.

⁵ Bede, *HE* ii.5; iii.6, 24; and also iv.26/24 on the decline of Northumbrian power after the battle of Nechtansmere, 685.

supremacy over the peoples of both northern Ireland and northern Britain, and over the islands inhabited by people from the northern parts of the British Isles.⁶ The problem of Wilfrid's claim will also require us to ask what was the nature of the commission given by Pope Vitalian to Theodore when he sent him to be archbishop of Canterbury in 668.⁷ Theodore was to instate Wilfrid as bishop of York in 669 and depose him in 678. Wilfrid may have claimed an authority over the northern half of Ireland, but Theodore indubitably exercised an authority over the bishop of York, perhaps by virtue of a special commission given him by Vitalian before he left Rome. Finally, the claims of Theodore and Wilfrid may be part of the context of the first English invasion of Ireland, launched from Northumbria in 684.

In order to understand the issues, we need first to have a clear notion as to what was, in the seventh century, a metropolitan bishop and an archbishop. Up to a point this is easily gained, for Levison explained it in his *England and the Continent in the Eighth Century*;⁸ yet there are difficulties, for our period is one of change: the distinctions which were admirably clear in 600 may have been not nearly so clear, or even positively untrue, in 700. In general, Levison's account presents the situation which obtained in the eighth rather than the seventh century; and, moreover, there were important differences between the eastern and western Churches.⁹ One of our principal sources, Bede, may look back at the previous century with anachronistic assumptions on this very issue of archbishops and metropolitans.¹⁰ It is safer to move forwards in time from the assumptions of the sixth century rather than backwards from Bede and Boniface.

The office with which any churchman of the sixth century was familiar was that of the metropolitan. Gregory, bishop of Tours, was just such a metropolitan, and from his writings and from the conciliar legislation of the Frankish Church we can gain a good idea of what metropolitans were thought to be. We can also gain an impression of the extent to which they were able to make good their claims in practice in the late

⁶ See M. Gibbs, 'The Decrees of Agatho and the Gregorian Plan for York', *Speculum*, 48 (1973), 213–46, with whose ideas I am in partial agreement.

⁷ The last problem, that of Theodore's commission, has been discussed by Nicholas Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury* (Leicester, 1984), esp. pp. 11–14, 63–80. While his account is admirably clear and measured I do not agree with all its conclusions.

⁸ Levison, *England and the Continent in the Eighth Century*, pp. 18–22.

⁹ R. A. Markus, 'Carthage – Prima Justiniana – Ravenna: An Aspect of Justinian's "Kirchenpolitik"', *Byzantion*, 49 (1979), 277–302.

¹⁰ By saying this I am not espousing Brechter's theory according to which London was Augustine's see; on this see Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury*, pp. 11–14.

sixth century. Whereas the bishop of Tours, as bishop of Tours, ruled over his episcopal city and its territory, the Touraine, as metropolitan he exercised a jurisdiction over the province of Lugdunensis Tertia, composed, besides Tours itself, of the bishoprics of Nantes, Vannes, Le Mans, Rennes, Angers, Corseul and Dol. Recalcitrant Bretons had made a serious dent in this province by Gregory's time, yet the metropolitan can be seen exercising, or attempting to exercise, his rights over Nantes, Le Mans, Rennes, Angers and Corseul.¹¹ Of these rights the most important are the following:

- (1) he had the right to consecrate any new bishop of a see within his province, just as he himself was normally to be consecrated by the bishops of his province;
- (2) he had the right and the duty to summon periodic synods of the bishops of his province;¹²
- (3) he was expected to exercise a general disciplinary jurisdiction over the whole province.

In practice, admittedly, metropolitans in Frankish Gaul were often unable to exercise their rights because the main role in the appointment of bishops was taken by kings.¹³ Although he was himself a metropolitan, Gregory of Tours showed no sympathy for the attempt by the great aristocrat Leontius, metropolitan bishop of Bordeaux, to remove a bishop of his province who had been consecrated by royal authority without the participation or agreement of his metropolitan.¹⁴ Furthermore, councils were often composed of the bishops of a given

¹¹ The bishops of Nantes, Angers, Rennes and Le Mans are among the signatories to the 'regional' Council of Tours, 567 (*Concilia Galliae, A. 511 – A. 695*, ed. de Clercq, p. 194), but the bishop of Rennes did not, apparently, sign the letter (*ibid.*, p. 199). This council was halfway between a provincial council of the province of Lugdunensis Tertia and a council of Charibert I's kingdom, as shown by the inclusion of the metropolitan bishop of Rouen.

¹² Cf. the Council of Tours, 567, c. 1 (*ibid.*, pp. 176–7); the second letter appended to the decrees of that council is written only by the bishops of the province and directed to the people.

¹³ The usual pattern was that the citizens sent a formal written notice of their *consensus* to the king (Marculf, *Formulae*, i.7, ed. K. Zeumer, *Formulae Merowingici et Karolini Aevi*, MEM, Legum Sectio v, Hanover, 1886, p. 47 gives a model text; cf. Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* iv.15); the king then sent a *praeceptio* (*ibid.*, iv.15) or *praeceptum* (Marculf, *Formulae*, i.5) or *indiculum* (*ibid.*, i.6) ordering the metropolitan, together with his *provinciales* or *comprovinciales*, to consecrate (*benedicere*) the chosen person as bishop.

¹⁴ Gregory of Tours, *Hist.*, iv.26: Emerius had received a *decretum* from Chlothar I that he was to be consecrated without the *consilium* of the metropolitan, 'quia non erat praesens'; contrast the Council of Paris, 556 x 573, c. 8 (ed. de Clercq, p. 208). Compare also the issue at the Council of Paris in 573 (*Concilia Galliae*, ed. de Clercq, pp. 212–13): the complaint was (1) that Châteaudun was only a *parrochia* of the *civitas* of Chartres; and (2) that Egidius of Reims had ordained a bishop to Châteaudun, in violation not merely of the rights of the bishop of Chartres but also of those of the metropolitan bishop of Sens. Egidius of Reims, however, consecrated Gregory to Tours in the same year.

kingdom rather than of an ecclesiastical province, and were summoned by royal command rather than by the metropolitan.¹⁵ When this produced a council at which more than one metropolitan attended, there might be a clear difference of authority. The bishop of Lyons seems to have presided over Burgundian councils, and on one occasion he even goes so far as to describe himself as a patriarch.¹⁶ At the 'national' Council of Paris in 614, the bishop of Lyons subscribed first, before the papal vicar, Florianus, bishop of Arles.¹⁷ In Spain the bishops of Toledo were even more successful in assuming the leadership within the whole kingdom in the seventh century. There, too, however, this development did not require the use of the title 'archbishop'.¹⁸ In the West, therefore, the old secular divisions of the Empire generally survived intact in the ecclesiastical dioceses and provinces of the Church, but sometimes the new secular territorial units created by the barbarian kingdoms overrode the inherited pattern.

Quite different from the office of the metropolitan were the special honours of the archbishopric and the pallium. Metropolitans were normal throughout the Church, archbishops were not. In the Western Church, which at this period included Greece and such of the Balkans as remained Christian, certain bishops received from the pope the pallium, a woollen garment worn during mass.¹⁹ Gregory the Great did not, however, call 'archbishop' all those to whom he granted the pallium. Indeed, two bishops who did receive the pallium from Gregory, Syagrius, bishop of Autun, and Donus, bishop of Messina, were neither archbishops nor metropolitans.²⁰ With one exception (Cagliari in Sardinia), Gregory only used the term 'archbishop' for a restricted number of metropolitan sees on the Adriatic and in Greece, ranging from Salona round to Thessalonica.²¹ The bishop of Arles in Gaul

¹⁵ For example, see the role of King Guntram's referendary, Asclepiodotus, in the Council of Valence (*Concilia Galliae*, de Clercq, p. 235), and the conflict of opinion reported in Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* ix.20, between King Guntram, who wished the bishops of the Austrasian kingdom of his nephew, King Childebert, to participate in a national synod, and Childebert, represented by his ambassador, Gregory himself, who favoured provincial synods summoned by their metropolitans. In 585, the aftermath of the Gundovald affair was debated at Orléans by both bishops and *optimates regis*: *ibid.*, viii.1. ¹⁶ The preface to Mâcon II, 585 (*Concilia Galliae*, ed. de Clercq, p. 238).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 280.

¹⁸ R. Collins, *Early Medieval Spain: Unity in Diversity, 400–1000* (London, 1983), pp. 71–3; but see the evidence of Isidore, discussed below, p. 421.

¹⁹ *Registrum*, iv.1; v.58; ix.227; xi.39. In Frankish Gaul, all bishops wore the pallium during mass: 'Vt episcopus sine pallo missas dicere non praesumat', Synod of Mâcon I, 581 × 583, 6 (*Concilia Galliae*, ed. de Clercq, p. 224); but not all received them from the pope. ²⁰ *Reg.*, vi.8; ix.222.

²¹ *Reg.*, i.26; ii.42; iii.8; viii.36; ix.196. The Treapitoline bishops of Istria also used the term for the former bishop of Aquileia, Helias, their present bishop, Severus, and unspecified *Galliarum archiepiscopi* in i.16a.

Table 10.1. *Justinian and the ranks of bishop*

	Bishop	Jurisdiction
Lowest rank	Greek: episcopus Latin: episcopus	[polis] [ciuitas]
Middle rank	Greek: metropolitēs Latin: metropolita	sunodos synodus
Highest rank	Greek: patriarcha Latin: archiepiscopus/patriarcha	dioikesis diocesis

received the pallium and was also papal vicar.²² He was not called an archbishop by Gregory.²³ There is no evidence that Gregory ever thought of Augustine of Canterbury as an archbishop.²⁴

The standpoint of the emperor on these matters was different. This is laid out in one of Justinian's Novels, a Latin version of which is quoted in Gregory the Great's Register.²⁵ The Novel is concerned with cases against ecclesiastics, whether the issue concerns secular law or the canons. It envisages a threefold hierarchy of bishops, the higher ones offering tribunals of appeal. The names for the bishops and their jurisdictions are shown in table 10.1 (the Greek is the original language; the Latin probably a sixth-century translation). The bishop in the lowest rank presides over the city and its appended territory, the basic unit of the government of the Empire. The metropolitan's concern is with an imperial province, in which he heads a synod of his fellow-bishops. The diocese, the responsibility of the patriarch (or, in the Latin version only, the archbishop) is not the modern diocese (that is governed by the bishop), but is a unit of secular government in the Late Empire, a form of super-province. Britain was a diocese, as was Spain. In the fourth century Gaul was divided into two dioceses (*Gallia* and *Septem Prouinciæ*), but this became irrelevant once the capital of *Gallia* at Trier was abandoned in favour of Arles after the disasters of the early fifth century. The organisation of the Church assumed by Justinian was, however,

²² *Ibid.*, v.58.

²³ In the inscription of *Reg.*, vi.51, he is called 'metropolita Galliis'. This shows that Gregory, when pressed to find a word to express an authority wider than that of the ordinary metropolitan, did not use the term 'archbishop'.

²⁴ He does not use the term in the letter given by Bede in *HE* i.29, in which he grants the pallium; similarly Pope Honorius wrote in 634 of pallia being sent to metropolitans: *ibid.*, ii.17.

²⁵ *Novel* 123, c. 22, *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, ed. Th. Mommsen, P. Krueger and R. Schoell, iii, *Novellæ*, ed. R. Schoell, 5th edn (Berlin, 1928), pp. 611–12; it is quoted *Reg.* xiii.50, a letter instructing a *defensor* going to Spain. For Justinian's intentions, see Markus, 'Carthage–Prima Justiniana – Ravenna'.

characteristic only of the East. There is one significant echo of his scheme in the Preface to the Synod of Mâcon in 585, where, as has been mentioned above, the bishop of Lyons referred to himself as *patriarcha*;²⁶ as he certainly enjoyed a primacy in Francia, his position was not unlike that envisaged by Justinian. Moreover, the authority of the bishop of Lyons was to become important for some Irishmen after Columbanus settled in Burgundy; he did not, however, call himself an archbishop. Perhaps more importantly for Ireland, Justinian's scheme was also echoed in a yet more elaborate form in Isidore's *Etymologies*: 'There is a fourfold ranking of bishops, that is, for patriarchs, archbishops, metropolitans and bishops.'²⁷ For Isidore, the title of patriarch was to be restricted to the apostolic sees (he cites Rome, Antioch and Alexandria, significantly omitting Constantinople); as for Spain, his classification entailed viewing some such figure as the bishop of Toledo as an archbishop.

(II) THE *COLLECTIO CANONUM HIBERNENSIS* AND THE BOOK OF
THE ANGEL

For an Irish view of these matters we may turn to the Irish Collection of Canons (*Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*), generally known as the *Hibernensis*, compiled between 716 and 725.²⁸ It is at least acquainted with the theory of bishops and metropolitans. Of archbishops it has heard nothing. In part this absence of any mention of archbishops is a matter of date – in part also, perhaps, a matter of deliberate standpoint. At least one of the crucial canons was already in existence when, in 632 or 633, Cummián wrote his letter to Ségéne, abbot of Iona, and the hermit Béccán in defence of the Easter limits of Victorius of Aquitaine.²⁹ At this date some Irish churchmen, even if one supposes that they had nothing corresponding to the metropolitan in Ireland, would have been acquainted with the institution as it existed in Francia. The links between Ireland and the Columbanian monasteries were probably behind the emergence

²⁶ The preface to Mâcon II, 585 (*Concilia Galliae*, ed. de Clercq, p. 238).

²⁷ Isidore, *Etymologiae sive Originum Libri XX*, ed. W. M. Lindsay, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1991), vii.12.

²⁸ Book xx, *De Provincia*, A Recension, ed. F. W. H. Wasserschleben, *Die irische Kanonensammlung*, 2nd edn (Leipzig, 1885), pp. 60–2. The best ms of the B Recension is Bodleian Hatton ms 42, where an expanded version of *De Provincia* is at fo. 32^r. The *terminus post quem* is given by the date of Iona's adhesion to the Roman Easter, 716, allied to the fact that Cú Chuimne, one of the compilers, was from Iona. The *terminus ante quem* is given by the obit of the other compiler, Ruben, in the Annals of Ulster, s.a. 725. The evidence of *De Provincia* is dismissed by Corish, *The Christian Mission*, p. 29, on grounds which, in my opinion, do not stand up to a detailed analysis of the text.

²⁹ Cummián, *De Controversia Paschali*, ed. Walsh and Ó Cróinín, p. 92, lines 276–7.

of the Easter question as a live issue in the 620s, since Luxeuil went over to the Easter of Victorius of Aquitaine after the death of Columbanus himself in 615, and probably in 626/7.³⁰ Since that issue was linked to the further question of the relationship between Luxeuil and the Frankish bishops, some Irishmen at home should have been acquainted with the organisation of the Frankish Church.

It is not, however, likely that talk of metropolitans in Ireland stemmed solely from recent links with the rest of Christendom. Cummian quotes only a part of the canon preserved in the B recension of the *Hibernensis*, namely that part which justifies taking an important and difficult issue to Rome. He does not quote the other clause – the one that prohibits the taking of cases from one province to another.³¹ The reason may be that he is justifying appeal to Rome against an objection that the abbot of Iona and Béccán could have made, namely that such an appeal is contrary to the canon forbidding the taking of cases from province to province and, in particular, overseas.³² Both sides to the debate in the 630s seem to have accepted the validity of canons which presupposed a Church of provinces as well as dioceses and thus of both bishops and metropolitans. How such canons were to be applied to the Irish Church might indeed be a difficult problem, but at least Cummian feels no need to explain the text he has quoted. He simply assumes that Ségéne and Béccán will both know and accept it.

In the Book of the Angel (which, for reasons which will become evident later, may be dated to the 680s) it is claimed that Armagh is the see of an archbishop and that the authority of this archbishop extends over the whole island.

(28) Further, if any case should arise which is exceedingly difficult and unknown to all the judges of the peoples of the Irish, it is by right to be referred to the see of the archbishop of the Irish, that is, of Patrick, and to the scrutiny of its bishop. (29) If, however, such a case concerning the aforesaid matter cannot easily be solved in that see with its wise men, we have decreed that it is to be

³⁰ By the date of the Synod of Mâcon (626 or 627) at the latest according to Krusch: Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, p. 38; but since (1) the question of the tonsure had evidently not been settled by that time, and (2) those two issues seem usually to have been resolved simultaneously or at least successively (as with Iona 716–17), and (3) the very close links between Bobbio and the papacy seem to have begun shortly after the synod, and (4) Jonas preserved a complete and tactful silence on the paschal issue, Krusch's argument from silence will not hold water. On all this, see above pp. 364–5.

³¹ The text of Hatton ms 42, fo. 32^v, is as follows, with the part quoted by Cummian in italics: 'Canones Romanorum dicunt: causa uniuscuiusque provinciae non deferenda ad alteram. *Si autem maiores cause fuerint exorte, ad caput urbium sunt referrende.*'

³² *Hib.* xx.3; cf. *Concilia Africae*, A. 345–525, ed. C. Munier, CCSL 259 (Turnhout, 1974): the different versions of the *Canones in Causa Apiarii*, c. 28 (pp. 109–10), c. 34 (pp. 127–8), c. 28 (p. 143).

remitted to the apostolic see, that is to the see of the apostle Peter which bears the authority of the city of Rome.³³

This is an astonishing claim, especially if one approaches it via the *Hibernensis*. If an Irish churchman of the eighth century, confronted with this claim made by Armagh to primacy over the whole island, wished to consult the *Hibernensis*, Book xx, *De Provincia*, would be the obvious place to which to turn. This book, short as it is, contains the balancing of opposed rules – the *sic et non* – typical of much of the *Hibernensis*: on the one hand, a province should judge its own cases, and, if it does not, it will lose its status; on the other hand it should seek help from outside (c. 5). Chapter 2 shows us what the compilers took to be a province. It is a secular as well as an ecclesiastical unit, with kings as well as bishops. Moreover, just as it has one supreme king to whom three other kings are subordinate, so also it has one major bishop and three lesser ones. Vernacular legal texts show that what we have here is a so-called ‘mesne kingdom’, ruled by an overking.³⁴ An example would be the Cruithni of modern Co. Antrim and the western parts of Co. Down. Their territory included more than one kingdom, and more than one bishopric.³⁵ Connor, however, appears to have emerged as the leading church of the area. This province seems, therefore, to have been a smaller unit than that usually called a province by modern historians: the latter use the term to translate Irish *cóiced* (‘fifth’) referring to an area such as Leinster or Munster. I shall therefore use the term ‘lesser province’ for this smaller territorial unit, as opposed to the ‘major province’, the *cóiced*.

The next chapter of the *Hibernensis* (xx.3) cites a Roman synod (normally a synod of the Roman party within the Irish Church). It uses the term ‘metropolitan bishop’ for the chief bishop of a lesser rather than a greater province, for the Cruithni rather than for the province of Ulster as a whole:

No province should lose status but should have its own judges and bishops. Whoever has a case, let it be judged before his own judges, and let him not migrate to others for the sake of wandering, and [thus] show a turbulent contempt for his fatherland, but let it be judged before the metropolitan bishop of his province. [*The B recension adds*] The following are declared to be Roman canons: No case is to be taken from one province to another; if, however, cases of major importance have arisen, they are to be referred to the chief of cities.

³³ *Liber Angeli*, ed. Bieler, § 28, p. 188.

³⁴ *Crith Gablach*, ed. Binchy, line 459.

³⁵ For example there were bishops, at one stage or another, at Coleraine (Adomnán, *VSC* i.50), Connor, and Ráith Epscoip Fhindhich in the land of the Uí Dercu Chéin (*VT*² 1915).

Chapter 3, however, is not entirely consistent with c. 5 (also a Roman synod). The latter talks of ‘a greater see’ beyond the province, and a synod which seems to be a yet further court of appeal within Ireland:

(a) A Roman synod: If issues have arisen in any province, and no agreement is possible between the clerics in dispute, let them be referred to a greater see, and if they cannot be easily settled there, let them be judged where a synod has been assembled. (b) Patrick: If any issues arise in this island, let them be referred to the apostolic see.

Chapter 5, therefore, envisages appeals to (1) the lesser province, (2) a ‘greater see’ beyond the lesser province, (3) a synod, and (4) Rome. For c. 3 (following the B recension), cases were either settled at the level of the province or went to ‘the chief of cities’, namely, as Cummián’s letter shows, Rome. For chapter 3, therefore, there are two levels of appeal, only one of which is within Ireland, while for chapter 5, there are four levels, three of which are within Ireland. It is this second version, with its four levels of appeal, which is closer to the Book of the Angel.

Yet there are important differences between chapter 5 of *De Provincia* and the Book of the Angel. First, the Book of the Angel is only interested in the higher levels to which a case might go. The province is not mentioned at this point. Moreover, the two highest levels in the *Hibernensis* are a synod and then Rome; for the Book of the Angel it is Armagh and then Rome. For that reason alone it is not likely that the ‘greater see’ of the *Hibernensis* is an oblique reference to Armagh. This greater see seems to come rather at the level of a major province, a *coiced*, such as Leinster or Munster.³⁶ In that case chapter 5 of the *Hibernensis* assumes a progression from a minor kingdom, which is also a minor diocese, to a lesser province corresponding to the mesne kingdom, and then on to a ‘greater see’ at the level of a major province, for example Ulster or Connaught. The next stage is a synod, which, from its position, must embrace more than one major province and thus be either a national synod or at least a synod of two or more major provinces, such as Leinster or Munster, and then finally Rome.³⁷ In this scheme there are three levels of bishop, just as in the vernacular law there are three grades

³⁶ For example, Óengus, bishop of the Ulstermen, AU 665.5. Óengus Ulath must be one of the *episcopi* rather than the *abbates* of this entry. The form of the names is X of Y where Y signifies the place or people over which X rules. Óengus is not here said to be an Ulsterman (which would be *dí Ulltaib dó*), but rather has authority over the Ulstermen.

³⁷ Most synods seem to have been at the level of the major province (e.g. AU 804. 7, although this was held at Dún Cuair [= Rathcore, N 76 45] close to the boundary of Leinster), but AU 780.12 has a *congressio* of the synods of the Uí Néill and the Leinstermen.

of king. In the abstract, these three levels might be compared with Justinian's scheme of bishop and city, metropolitan and provincial synod, and patriarch and diocese, but the likelihood of any direct link is slight, not just because of the remoteness of Ireland from the Eastern Empire, but because there is no use of the term 'patriarch'.³⁸ In the scheme championed in chapter 3 of the *Hibernensis*, however, there are only two levels, minor bishop and metropolitan, as in the normal pattern of the Western Church. Chapter 5, therefore, with its direct equivalence between the ecclesiastical grades of bishop and the secular grades of king, is distinctively Irish; but chapter 3 is not.

The different interests involved in these two schemes, both given by the *Hibernensis*, are evident enough if we consider the identity of the 'greater see'. I have already said that, from its position in the total scheme, it should be the principal church of a major province such as Leinster. In an early addition to the Book of the Angel we are told that Patrick said to Brigit, the saint of Kildare in Leinster: 'your *paruchia* in your province will be deemed to belong to your sole authority (*monarchia*)'.³⁹ This may amount to an admission that Kildare is the 'greater see' of Leinster, as in the scheme envisaged by chapter 5 of *De Provincia*.⁴⁰ In the *Hibernensis*, therefore, chapter 3 champions the lesser province, such as the Cruithni already mentioned, or the Uí Cheinselaig and the Uí Bairrche in central and southern Leinster, against such great sees as Kildare; chapter 5, on the other hand, is more favourable to the greater churches.⁴¹ When, therefore, we compare seventh-century Ireland to Francia or England, it is not the absence of metropolitan sees, still less ordinary dioceses in the modern sense, which should strike us; rather it is the conflict between two models of ecclesiastical organisation, both episcopal, but serving different interests. This conflict itself has its counterparts in both Francia, where the metropolitan of Lyons sought

³⁸ The most likely avenue of communication would be *via* Lyons, but it used, once at least, the term 'patriarch', not 'archbishop'.

³⁹ *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, ed. Bieler, pp. 188–90. My translation differs from that of Bieler.

⁴⁰ There are two ways in which to take the contrast between 'your province', i.e. that of Brigit, and the '*pars orientalis et occidentalis*' which belong to Patrick: (1) Leinster versus Ulster (*pars orientalis*) and Connaught (*pars occidentalis*), or (2) the province in question is a lesser province, Tethbae, which is being contrasted with Brega and Meath as the *pars orientalis* and Connaught as the *pars occidentalis*. Southern Tethbae had close links with Brigit: *Bethu Brigte*, ed. Ó hAodha, cc. 30–5. The second fits our notions of geography better, but cf. *CGH* i.153–4 (143a) which would support (1).

⁴¹ Cf. the *ollam úasal-epscoip*, 'supreme one of noble bishops', of *Uraicecht Becc*, who, according to the gloss, was 'the bishop of the church of the king of a *cóiced* or the soul-friend of the king of a *cóiced*', and so the principal bishop of a *cóiced*: *CIH* 2282.25–6. The gloss is probably correct since, in the same passage, the *ollam* among kings was the king of Munster.

to secure a primacy within Burgundy and even within Francia as a whole, and Spain where the authority of Toledo, gained from the 630s, would have provided an excellent model for Kildare and Armagh. Both these examples may have affected Irish churchmen: the bishop of Lyons, for example, used his authority within Burgundy to preside over the Synod of Mâcon in 626/7, at which the position of Luxeuil, Columbanus' foundation, was hotly disputed.⁴²

What is novel in the Book of the Angel is the claim that Armagh is the see of an archbishop whose authority extends over all the Irish. Some form of primacy of honour for St Patrick seems to have been widely accepted in the seventh century, as shown by Cummian's description of Patrick as *papa noster*.⁴³ Cummian's testimony is all the more precious in that he was writing in the 630s, had no special connection with Armagh and the principal recipient of his letter was abbot of Iona. The list of signatories to *Cáin Adomnáin*, promulgated in 697, likewise places the bishop of Armagh first.⁴⁴ This is especially significant since the assembly which promulgated the Law of Adomnán was summoned by the abbot of Iona and the chief lay participant was his kinsman, Loingsech mac Óengusa, then the leading Uí Néill king, not known as a friend of Armagh. In the late seventh century, therefore, some sort of primacy had long been granted to Armagh. A primacy of honour, however, is one thing, an archbishopric another. At the councils of Orléans, 549, and Paris, 614, the metropolitan of Lyons took precedence over the metropolitan of Arles, though the latter was the papal vicar for Gaul, and as such received from the pope the pallium.⁴⁵ This example shows that Armagh's lack of a papal pallium was not a fatal defect in its primatial claims, but it was a handicap nonetheless when compared with the position of Canterbury in Britain. The authority of Armagh is therefore said in the Book of the Angel to be derived from the message brought to Patrick by the angel: in other words, its authority derives immediately from God. In earthly terms it is derived from the *apostolicus doctor* and

⁴² See above, p. 364.

⁴³ Cummian, *De Controversia Paschali*, ed. Walsh and Ó Cróinín, lines 208–9; R. Sharpe, 'St Patrick and the See of Armagh', *CMCS*, 4 (Winter 1982), 37–9.

⁴⁴ Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Guarantor List of *Cáin Adomnáin*', 180 (text) and 185–6 (commentary).

⁴⁵ *Concilia Galliae*, ed. de Clercq, pp. 157 and 280. This situation may not have been to the liking of the papacy: compare the way in which Gregory the Great, never a great stickler for the correct legal form, refers to the bishop of Arles as *metropolita Gallias*, 'metropolitan for the Gallic provinces', *Reg.* vi.51. The *Galliarum archiepiscopi* of *Reg.* i.16a, a letter written by bishops of the province of Istria to the Emperor Maurice, might be the bishops of Arles, but are more likely to be their colleagues of Lyons. It is not, in any event, evidence for Frankish archbishops, since Istria lay within the area in which the term 'archbishop' was traditional.

summus pontifex, Patrick himself. These phrases, ‘apostolic teacher’ and ‘supreme pontiff’, are, in effect, building up Patrick as an Irish substitute for St Peter. The purpose was not to establish, or defend, any Irish detachment from the papacy – no one thought in such terms – but rather to provide a respectable antiquity for the pre-eminence of Armagh within Ireland. The relics of Peter and Paul, Stephen and Laurence which Armagh claimed to have received might help, but they were no substitute for the pallium.⁴⁶

We have, then, a puzzle. Armagh could apparently get what it wanted by working within the various schemes laid out in the *Hibernensis*. Those schemes never envisaged an archbishopric. Moreover, the claim that Armagh was the see of an archbishop was not (in strictly contemporary terms, comparing Armagh with Canterbury) plausible. In England such an honour depended upon a direct papal gift of the pallium, and this connection was being repeated in the cases of the English missionaries, Willibrord among the Frisians and Boniface in central Germany;⁴⁷ yet Armagh never even pretended to have any right to a papal pallium. What, therefore, was the point of the claim?

One part of the explanation of Armagh’s archiepiscopal claims lies within Ireland, the other in England. I shall take the Irish bit of the jigsaw first. Cogitosus wrote his *Life of Brigit* almost certainly in the second half of the seventh century, and in my opinion probably *c.* 675. In it he claims that Kildare is the see of an archbishop and that its authority stretches throughout Ireland, extending from sea to sea. At that stage, therefore, it was Kildare that was playing the archiepiscopal card. Moreover, the implication of the claim was the same as in the *Book of the Angel*, namely an authority over the whole of Ireland. Indeed the claim is bolder, one might even say more brazen, than that advanced by Armagh. The latter could at least appeal to the long-established notion that Patrick was the special apostle of the Irish. No one claimed that Brigit converted the Irish. The claims of Kildare require, even more than do those of Armagh, a special explanation. Otherwise the claim would not have even the shadow of plausibility that would make it worth advancing.

⁴⁶ *Liber Angeli*, c. 19; cf. Tirechán, *Collectanea*, 48.3, and the notes between Muirchú and Tirechán, ii.5 (ed. Bieler, p. 122). The relics are reminiscent of those given to Oswiu by Vitalian, Bede, *HE* iii.29.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, v.11, and the comment in Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People: A Historical Commentary*, p. 184; Boniface, *Ep.* 28 (ed. M. Tangl, *S. Bonifatii et Lullii Epistolae*, MGH, Epp. Selectae, i, Berlin, 1955, p. 49).

(III) KILDARE AND THE ROMANI

The idea of an archbishop as an authority superior to a metropolitan is likely to have been imported into Ireland during the seventh century. Gregory of Tours never mentions the word, nor does he allude to any such rank. Lyons had its ambitions but did not use the term 'archbishop'. The bishops of Istria, who did, were too remote from Ireland. In the seventh century, however, the most likely context for Kildare's aspirations is the period when Kildare had adopted the Roman Easter but Armagh had not. Only then might Kildare be in a position to defeat the trump card being deployed by Armagh and acknowledged by Cummmian, namely the status of Patrick as apostle of the Irish. Then, and only then, was it possible to suppose that an orthodox archbishop, with his see at Kildare, might extend his authority 'from sea to sea'. By the time that Cogitosus wrote his *Life of Brigit*, Kildare had undoubtedly conformed to Roman practice. This probably occurred in the 630s, when the bulk at least of southern Irish churches adopted the paschal tables of Victorius of Aquitaine.⁴⁸ At the end of that decade there were further interchanges between Rome and a group of Irish churches headed by Armagh and including Iona. The hope at this stage was that a compromise might be reached by exploiting alternatives offered by Victorius' paschal tables.⁴⁹ The efforts at compromise did not entirely succeed, since Iona and many other churches remained faithful to the traditional Irish Easter. Unfortunately it is not known directly when Armagh abandoned the traditional Easter. It very probably occurred before 688, since by then Áed of Sleaty had subjected his church – the principal episcopal foundation among the Uí Bairrche of central and southern Leinster – to Armagh.⁵⁰ It is generally, and I am sure rightly, thought that Áed would not have taken this action had Armagh and the

⁴⁸ Probably not Taghmon, which had close links with Iona: Heist, *Vitae*, p. 207; Cummmian, *De Controversia Paschali*, ed. Walsh and Ó Cróinín, pp. 90–4, where St Munnu may have been the *paries dealbatus*; Bede, *HE* iii.3.

⁴⁹ Ó Cróinín, 'New Heresy for Old', 505–16; cf. also Harrison, 'A Letter from Rome to the Irish Clergy', Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, pp. 228–9.

⁵⁰ AU 688.1 is the obit of Ségéne, bishop of Armagh, who was involved in the transaction. To judge by the evidence of the *Life of Munnu* (cc. 29–30, ed. Heist, *Vitae*, p. 207), another church in the Barrow valley, Lethglinn, was the pre-eminent champion of the Roman Easter at the Synod of Mag nAilbe (Old Leighlin, townland and parish near Leighlinbridge, Co. Carlow, in the territory of Uí Drona, later the barony of Idrome; but a minor branch of the Uí Bairrche, Uí Dobágu, was situated at or by the church, *CGH* i.52). Glenn Uissen (now Killeslin) was a major monastery only a mile or two from Sleaty, but may not have been an episcopal church.

southern Irish churches still been on opposite sides of the paschal controversy.⁵¹

In the first third of the seventh century, therefore, it is most unlikely that any Irish church claimed to be the see of an archbishop. Links with Francia, England and Italy, however, brought the paschal issue to a head c. 630. Between the 630s and, at the latest, 688, Kildare and Armagh were on opposite sides over Easter and the tonsure. This conflict over Easter was probably the context in which Kildare made its claim to be an archbishopric, and thereby issued a challenge to the primacy of honour enjoyed by Armagh.⁵² The challenge was answered by the Book of the Angel, but only when Armagh herself had conformed to Roman practice.

(IV) THE CLAIMS OF WILFRID AND THEODORE

The final explanation for the archiepiscopal claims of both Kildare and Armagh lies, however, not in Ireland but in Britain. It can best be approached by considering the relationship between Wilfrid, bishop of York, and Theodore, archbishop of Canterbury. The context is the aftermath of the Synod of Whitby, when the authority of Iona over the Northumbrian Church came to an end.⁵³ Wilfrid was the champion of the Roman party at Whitby, and the Life by Stephen makes it clear that he continued to oppose any remnants of Irish influence in Northumbria even after 664.⁵⁴ A further decisive change in the ecclesiastical scene occurred, however, when the monk Theodore of Tarsus acquired the position of archbishop of the whole of Britain.⁵⁵ He too was to be a fierce opponent of the position to which Iona still clung, yet he and Wilfrid clashed with the result that Wilfrid was later expelled from York in 678.⁵⁶

According to one view, once Theodore had established himself in Canterbury he at once demonstrated his intention to exercise metropolitan authority in Northumbria by deposing Chad from the see of York and installing Wilfrid (who had already been consecrated to York in

⁵¹ Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, pp. 115–6; Sharpe, 'Armagh and Rome in the Seventh Century', 64. ⁵² Cf. the primacy enjoyed in Gaul by the bishop of Lyons.

⁵³ See above, p. 317. ⁵⁴ *Vita S. Wilfridi*, cc. 12, 14.

⁵⁵ Bede, *HE* iv.1; for his title, see *HE* iv.17/15 (where Bede gives the preface to the record of the Council of Hatfield, including the phrase, 'Theodorus . . . archiepiscopus Britanniae insulae et ciuitatis Doruuernis'). ⁵⁶ Bede, *HE* iv.2; Stephen, *Vita S. Wilfridi*, c. 24.

664–5 but had been unable to take up office).⁵⁷ Wilfrid may have hoped that York would be raised to metropolitan status, as suggested by the references in Stephen's *Life of Wilfrid*, but he took no active steps to secure it. The issue, according to Brooks, was not central to the dispute which later broke out between him and Theodore. The latter was a matter of the initial desire of Ecgrith and Iurminburg to get rid of Wilfrid and Theodore's desire to divide the huge Northumbrian diocese. Theodore's motives were pastoral; he acted uncanonically, without the consent of the bishop affected, because he was an old man in a hurry. The initiative was Northumbrian; the metropolitan authority was a necessary means; it was obtained because of the prospect of pastoral gain.

Stephen, however, perceived the authority of Colmán as being that of a metropolitan.⁵⁸ He thus portrayed Wilfrid as succeeding to a metropolitan see already in possession of its rights.⁵⁹ Admittedly, in order to do so within a Gregorian context Stephen had to pretend that Colmán was bishop of York; but that was not a point of crucial importance, for Chad, and possibly even Tuda before him, had been bishop of York before Wilfrid was put in charge of his see by Theodore.⁶⁰ When Theodore removed Chad and put Wilfrid into his see of York, he was acting not as metropolitan bishop of the southern province envisaged by Gregory the Great,⁶¹ but as archbishop of Britain. The implication of Stephen's view is, therefore, that Theodore, from the very start, was archbishop of the whole of Britain, and that his authority was consistent with, but transcended, the position of Wilfrid as metropolitan bishop of York.⁶² Both Stephen and Bede perceive the title of archbishop of Britain as existing at the beginning of Theodore's episcopate.⁶³ At the Council of Hertford in 673, however, Theodore is only 'bishop of the church of Canterbury', while in the Council of Hatfield in 680, after Wilfrid's expulsion, he is 'archbishop of the island of Britain and of the city of

⁵⁷ Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury*, p. 72.

⁵⁸ *Vita S. Wilfridi*, c. 10.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, c. 15.

⁶⁰ *HE* iii.28 for Chad; if the Synod of Whitby was the point of change from Lindisfarne to York, Tuda would have been bishop of York. The question is obscured by uncertainty as to what Alhfrith intended by sending Wilfrid to Gaul to be consecrated as bishop for his sub-kingdom and as to whether his action was linked to his rebellion against Oswiu.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, i.29.

⁶² Stephen, *Vita S. Wilfridi*, c. 15 (archbishop Theodore brings the 'statuta apostolicae sedis' from Rome to the king of the Deirans and Bernicians, Oswiu; removes Chad and installs Wilfrid as, c. 16, 'episcopus metropolitanus Eboracae civitatis').

⁶³ In Bede's case this is also applied to Augustine, *Britanniarum archiepiscopus*, *HE* ii. 3; in other words, for Bede, Theodore's authority was a revival of that granted as a personal favour to Augustine (*ibid.*, i.29).

Canterbury'.⁶⁴ Since an archbishop may call himself bishop, this does not prove that Wilfrid's expulsion was the occasion of Theodore's claim to be archbishop, particularly since he had earlier removed Chad from York. The letter of Pope Vitalian to Oswiu envisages the person consecrated to Canterbury cooperating with Oswiu throughout the island of Britain.⁶⁵ The probability is that Bede and Stephen were right in regarding Theodore's authority as extending over the whole island from the start.

The *Hibernensis* allows us to dismiss the objections which have been made against the evidence of Stephen's Life of Wilfrid.⁶⁶ It has been assumed that since the Irish Church was monastic, not diocesan,⁶⁷ the proposition that Colmán was a metropolitan bishop could not be true.⁶⁸ If there were no dioceses, there were no ecclesiastical provinces; and similarly, so the implication runs, if there were no diocesan bishops, there were no metropolitan bishops either. Recent work has shown that bishops played a much more considerable part in the early Irish Church than used to be supposed.⁶⁹ The most ingrained conservative cannot any longer dismiss the *Hibernensis* when it speaks of bishops; neither should he dismiss it when it talks of metropolitans. In Ireland it was inevitable that ecclesiastical divisions would correspond more closely than in Francia to the boundaries of royal power, for there was no other way of dividing up the island. Provinces embracing more than one bishopric would not correspond exactly to the Frankish pattern; but that is no reason for denying their existence. Even among the Franks, as we have seen, present political boundaries often overrode those inherited from the Empire when it came to synods.

The principal argument against thinking that the metropolitan status of York had much to do with the dispute between Wilfrid and Theodore is the notion that, in England, to be a metropolitan one had to be an archbishop in possession of a papal pallium. Wilfrid never claimed to be archbishop; nor did he make any efforts, as far as we know, to secure the pallium. That would have to wait until 735. Yet it is admitted that in

⁶⁴ Ibid., iv.5, 17/15.

⁶⁵ Ibid., iii.29 'eum instructum ad uestrum dirigemus patriam, ut ipse et uiua uoce, et per diuina oracula omnem inimici zizaniam ex omni uestra insula cum diuino nutu eradict'.

⁶⁶ The case against Stephen's claim is best put by Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury*, pp. 72-4.

⁶⁷ Cf. F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd edn (Oxford, 1971), p. 119.

⁶⁸ This is the implication, though it is not stated outright, of D. H. Farmer, 'Saint Wilfrid', in D. Kirby (ed.), *Saint Wilfrid at Hexham* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1974), p. 47.

⁶⁹ See above, pp. 258-65.

Frankish Gaul in the seventh century there was no such linkage between metropolitan status and possession either of a pallium sent from Rome or of the archiepiscopal title.⁷⁰

The link between the issue of the metropolitan status of York and the problems aroused by the claims of Armagh in Ireland is the passage in the Life of Wilfrid according to which he declared his faith in a council held in Rome in the time of Agatho 'for all the northern part of Britain and of Ireland and for the islands which were inhabited by the peoples of the English and of the Britons and also the Irish and the Picts'.⁷¹ According to Stephen the evidence of this subscription, when read out in 704, was crucial in winning the day for Wilfrid. There must be some connection between Wilfrid's claim to authority over the northern half of Britain and the campaigns of Oswiu and Ecgrith against the Picts. Both Bede and Stephen speak of Wilfrid's authority marching hand in hand with the extension of Northumbrian power.⁷² Yet the claim he made in Rome extended much further than the land of the Picts. It embraced both Dál Riata and the whole of the northern half of Ireland, including, therefore, Armagh. Furthermore, the careful reference to the islands inhabited by the Irish and the Picts would bring in not merely the Isle of Man, but also, much more importantly, Iona.

These claims have generally been ignored by Anglo-Saxon historians, perhaps because they seem so remote from practical reality. Yet even if the grander dreams to be found at the court of Ecgrith of Northumbria were to come to a sudden end at Nechtansmere, they may still give us a clue as to what seemed possible in the 670s. After all, the Northumbrians were to launch an attack on Brega in 684, and it has even been argued that the Uí Néill were part of a great alliance against Ecgrith in 685, prefiguring, but with very different results, the battle of Brunanburh.⁷³

⁷⁰ Even in England, the letter from Gregory the Great in Bede, *HE* i.29, envisaged giving the pallium to the bishop of York before the death of Augustine and therefore while York remained subject to London (where Gregory thought Augustine would be). Pallia became more closely attached to a metropolitan authority in the letters of Pope Honorius in 634 (*ibid.*, ii.17, 18): Paulinus had already consecrated the other Honorius as bishop of Canterbury (*ibid.*, ii.16), and the pope envisaged the pallia as being used in the future when one metropolitan consecrated the other 'ex hac nostra auctoritate'. He was giving papal authority to a practice which had already begun. If the pallium had been required at Honorius' consecration in order to make him a metropolitan, he would never have occupied this rank, since he had been consecrated for at least three years before the papal letter was ever sent.

⁷¹ 'pro omni aquilonali parte Britanniae et Hiberniae insulisque quae ab Anglorum et Brittonum necnon Scottorum et Pictorum gentibus colebantur', *Vita S. Wilfridi*, c. 53.

⁷² Bede, *HE* iv.3; Stephen, *Vita S. Wilfridi*, c. 21.

⁷³ H. Moisl, 'The Bernician Royal Dynasty and the Irish in the Seventh Century', *Peritia*, 2 (1983), 99–124.

In 684 the ruler of the southern Uí Néill, Fínsnechtae Fledach, who was based in Brega, held the kingship of Tara. Indeed the rulers of Brega had dominated the northern half of Ireland for a generation, to the point when Tírechán could identify the Uí Néill kingship with the southern Uí Néill.⁷⁴ In 684, therefore, Ecgrith was striking at the principal centre of political power in the northern half of Ireland. One function of the expedition seems to have been to take captives who were then to be held as hostages so as to induce Uí Néill submission.⁷⁵

The immediate context of Wilfrid's claim is both the secular ambitions of Ecgrith, allowing Wilfrid to extend his 'kingdom of churches' northwards among the Picts, and the Easter controversy.⁷⁶ The distinction between southern Ireland, namely Leinster and Munster, and the northern half can only be that the south had already gone over to the Roman Easter a generation earlier. Iona had before 664 enjoyed authority both over the Northumbrian Church, the Picts, and also its dependent churches in the northern half of Ireland itself. Once Wilfrid had linked his metropolitan claims to his well-attested championship of orthodoxy against those he believed to be Quartodeciman heretics, his extension of his authority far beyond the limits of any one people might be justified – not just over Picts and Britons but also over the northern Irish. He perhaps wanted York to be the new, orthodox Iona.

Such ambitions, however, were wider than merely asserting the metropolitan status of the church of York. They need to be examined in the light of the position of Theodore and the letter of Pope Vitalian to Oswiu. The latter was addressed to Oswiu and only to Oswiu, even though Bede tells us that both Ecgberht king of Kent and Oswiu sent the embassy to Rome.⁷⁷ The initial subject of the pope's letter was not the archbishopric of Canterbury but the prospects opened up by the conversion of Oswiu to 'the true and apostolic faith': c. 666 Rome still

⁷⁴ Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 10, on the hegemony prophesied by Patrick for the descendants of Conall, namely Conall Cremthainne, ancestor of the southern Uí Néill; similarly, c. 17, where the lands of the Uí Néill are the kingdoms of the southern Uí Néill.

⁷⁵ For the captives, see AU 687. 5; also cf. Adomnán, *VSC*, ii.46. The expedition was planned in advance, without any attempt at concealment to judge by Bede's reference to the attempts of Ecgrith, resident in Ireland, to dissuade Ecgrith from making the attack: *HE* iv.26 (24). (Compare the roles of Cuthbert and Ecgberht as opponents of Ecgrith's aggressive policy.) The attack by Britons on the leading Cruithnian kingdom of Mag Line in 682 may be connected (AU s.a.), if the Britons were subject to Ecgrith. This is quite likely because they probably came from the Isle of Man, subject to Northumbria since Edwin's reign, or Rheged, subject since at least c. 650.

⁷⁶ Stephen, *Vita S. Wilfridi*, c. 21.

⁷⁷ Bede, *HE* iii.29. In the *Historia Abbatum*, c. 3, it is only Ecgberht of Kent who sends Wighard to Rome.

regarded the northern Irish and British observance of Easter as tantamount to heresy, just as it had done in 640. The consequence of Oswiu's conversion was, for the pope, that the king now laboured to convert all the English to the orthodox faith.

The scope of Pope Vitalian's letter, however, was wider than simply the lands inhabited by the English. The quotation from Isaiah 49:1 ('Listen, O isles, unto me, and hearken, ye peoples from afar') is not unexpected: it is later used, for example, in the *Life of Anskar* to refer to the mission to the Scandinavians. It is picked up again, however, at the end of the letter in the hope that, as Oswiu seeks the kingdom of God and his justice, so will 'all his islands be subdued to Him'.⁷⁸ In the light of what Wilfrid was to make of authority over islands, it is plausible to think that Oswiu's letter had contained some request for a papal blessing on a proposal to bring, not just Britain, but 'islands' into the orthodox fold via Northumbrian hegemony. Perhaps the alliance of Oswald's day between the royal power of the king of the Northumbrians and the ecclesiastical power of Iona was now to be replaced by a combination of York and Canterbury on the ecclesiastical side and Oswiu's own military power: it was he, according to Bede, who made the Irish of Dál Riata pay tribute.⁷⁹ We do not have the whole of Vitalian's letter, only those portions preserved by Bede. If we had it intact, it is not impossible that it would appear as an early medieval counterpart to the bull *Laudabiliter*, sent to Henry II by the one English pope, Hadrian IV, authorising him to 'enter the island of Ireland in order to subject its people to law and to root out from them the weeds of vice'. The reference to Oswiu's ambition to subject 'the islands' ought to imply, at the very least, the intention to bring his power to bear on Iona in the interests of orthodoxy. Oswiu may even have asked for papal confirmation that Iona, since it belonged to Britain rather than to Ireland, was subject to York in accordance with the scheme set out by Gregory the Great.

It follows from this interpretation of Vitalian's letter that Wilfrid's claim to have declared the orthodox faith for the northern part of Ireland as well as for the northern part of Britain, and for the islands adjacent to both, was in accord with the earlier ambitions of Oswiu and the terms of Vitalian's letter. It was not a personal flight of fancy. Similarly, it is not surprising that Bede disapproved of the Northumbrian

⁷⁸ In Bede, *HE* iii.29, Colgrave and Mynors's translation omits 'Nimirum . . . impetrabit'. What Bede is saying is that as Oswiu seeks the kingdom of God and His justice, so will his (Oswiu's) islands will be subject to Him (God); the subject of 'quaerit et impetrabit' must be Oswiu (the *uestra celsitudo* of an earlier sentence), given the *quaerite* just before; hence in 'et ei omnes suae insulae' *ei* should be God but *suae* refers to Oswiu.

⁷⁹ Bede, *HE* ii.5.

expedition of 684 against the southern Uí Néill, for he did not believe that the Irish and the Britons were heretics; no crusade was required. Bede thus adopted the position taken at the time by Ecgberht, the leading English churchman resident in Ireland, and Cuthbert, bishop of Lindisfarne. In 684, however, it is likely that, as in Stephen's Life of Wilfrid, many regarded both the northern Irish and the Britons as schismatics and as heretics; for them the expedition of 684 may indeed have had a religious justification.

What the Irish needed in the face of such threats was an improved reputation for orthodoxy as well as their own provincial organisation, accepted as legitimate; only then could they rebut the claims of men such as Wilfrid.⁸⁰ It is impossible to prove that the claim of Armagh to archiepiscopal dignity, and an authority over the whole island of Ireland, were directly imitated from the authority and rank enjoyed by Canterbury after the arrival of Theodore, but it is very likely. One can at least see just why it was prudent to put forward such claims, and why the movement towards paschal orthodoxy in northern Ireland seems to have occurred in just this period.

The claims made by Wilfrid in Agatho's council make sense if, and only if, he believed that the northern Irish churches remained schismatic and heretical. Only then would they be disqualified from declaring the faith for themselves. The implication is that the principal northern churches conformed to Roman practice after 678 when Wilfrid was expelled from his diocese. We have already seen that Armagh had almost certainly conformed by 688. The most likely date between 678 and 688 lies in the years immediately after 684, the date of Ecgrith's attack on Brega. We know that this attack caused considerable alarm in Ireland. In the notes appended to the end of Tírechán's *Collectanea*, one of the three petitions which Patrick addressed to God on behalf of the Irish was 'that no foreign peoples should rule over us for ever'.⁸¹

The Book of the Angel is emphatic in its Roman orthodoxy. It advances as one of its principal claims that a 'special reverence' is due to Armagh on account of its possession of Roman relics, 'of Peter and Paul, of Stephen, Lawrence and others'.⁸² This claim is reminiscent of the list of Roman relics sent by Pope Vitalian to Oswiu.⁸³ The Book of

⁸⁰ Cf. T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'The Pastoral Role of the Church in the Early Irish Laws', in J. Blair and R. Sharpe (eds.), *Pastoral Care before the Parish* (Leicester, 1992), p. 68.

⁸¹ *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, ed. Bieler, p. 164; cf. *Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchy, lines 522–3. It should be remembered that, at this date, Armagh had high hopes of the Uí Néill of Brega, SílnÁeda Sláne, who were the direct object of Ecgrith's attack.

⁸² *Liber Angeli*, c. 19 (ed. Bieler, p. 186).

⁸³ Bede, *HE* iii.29.

the Angel is also careful to stress, as we have seen, that issues which cannot be settled in Ireland should go to Rome, a proposition which immediately implied acceptance of the Roman Easter and tonsure. Perhaps it was in these very years that the cult of Patrick effectively swallowed up that of Palladius, the bishop sent by Pope Celestine to the Irish in 431. This was a prerequisite before the Heir of Patrick could deploy his claims to full authority under Rome with any conviction.⁸⁴ In that way, moreover, Irish Christianity could lay claim to a Roman origin corresponding closely to, and older than, that of Augustine's Canterbury. The Book of the Angel, therefore, with its claim that Armagh was the see of an archbishop of irreproachable Roman orthodoxy, may be dated after the expulsion of Wilfrid in 678.

This view of Armagh's conversion to the Roman Easter allows us to understand Bede's account of the matter.⁸⁵ According to him, Adomnán, abbot of Iona, came to Northumbria as the ambassador of his people, after the accession of his friend Aldfrith in 685. The purpose, though Bede does not state as much, was to negotiate the release of the captives taken from Brega in 684. During Adomnán's visit to Northumbria he was persuaded by various scholars, among them Ceolfrith, abbot of Wearmouth-Jarrow, to adopt the Roman observance. On his return to Iona, he failed to convert his community, but succeeded in northern Ireland, except for those churches which were under the authority of Iona. Bede's view of the northern Irish churches is thus that the majority conformed shortly after 686, while the Columban churches only did so with Iona itself in 716. Bede was not, however, aware that Adomnán made two visits to Northumbria, in 686 and in 688, and he may also have thought that Adomnán died *c.* 690 rather than in 704.⁸⁶ Armagh had, very probably, conformed to Roman practice shortly before the date of Adomnán's second visit to Northumbria in 688; and Adomnán's achievement in northern Ireland may well, therefore, have been less than Ceolfrith and Bede supposed.⁸⁷ Yet Ceolfrith's personal role in helping to convert Adomnán was, no doubt, a treasured memory in his monastery: it foreshadowed Ecgbert's later achievement in converting the monks of Iona to the Roman Easter in 716, and the parallel between the two may be part of the reason why

⁸⁴ D. N. Dumville, 'Acta Palladii preserved in Patrician Hagiography?', in Dumville *et al.*, *Saint Patrick, AD 493–1993*, pp. 65–84. ⁸⁵ Bede, *HE* v.15.

⁸⁶ Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, pp. 187–8.

⁸⁷ Herbert, *Iona Kells, and Derry*, pp. 48–52, provides a balanced view of this phase in Adomnán's career.

Bede gave Ecgberht so central a position in his History. It would not be in the least surprising if, for Ceolfrith and Bede, Adomnán came to represent a whole movement of change of which he was only a part. In Bede's eyes, Ceolfrith's persuasion of Adomnán would have paid some of the spiritual debt owed to the Irish by the English. He would not be likely to distinguish the role of Armagh from that of Adomnán, especially since the two events occurred so close to each other. The return of the captives through Adomnán's efforts and the adoption of Roman orthodoxy both signified a change from the confrontational tactics adopted by Wilfrid and Ecgfrith. Not surprisingly, it was precisely in these years that Ecgberht, who had attempted to dissuade Ecgfrith from his attack on Brega, began the mission to the continental kith and kin of the English.⁸⁸ The peace now restored after 685 was a natural moment in which to recall, and to begin to emulate, the conversion of the Northumbrians by the Irish.

A fairly detailed reconstruction of the events of these years may, therefore, be proposed. The Synod of Whitby in 664 initiated a period of just over twenty years during which the causes of orthodoxy and of Northumbrian expansionism in northern Britain were closely linked. The programme was outlined by Oswiu in his letter to the pope, taken to Rome, perhaps by Wighard, *c.* 666 – a letter to which Vitalian's reply is partially preserved by Bede. Oswiu's plan by which a Northumbrian domination of northern Britain would have papal blessing was then associated with the harshly anti-Quartodeciman policy of Theodore. His authority was intended to extend over the whole of Britain, not just over the English. With Theodore and his immediate successors, and only with them, do we hear of archbishops of Britain. The new line taken in England had its repercussions in Ireland. Theodore had many Irish pupils, while Wilfrid had influential Irish contacts, as the episode of Dagobert II illustrates.⁸⁹ Iona was directly threatened, since Dál Riata paid tribute to the Northumbrians. Moreover, the explicit reference by both Vitalian and Wilfrid to islands adjacent to Britain probably referred primarily to Iona. In this context, *c.* 675, Kildare made its claim to be the see of an archbishop whose authority extended over the whole of Ireland from sea to sea. An orthodox archbishop of Ireland might hope to imitate the energetic moves being made against the heretics and

⁸⁸ Bede, *HE* v.9.

⁸⁹ Stephen, *Vita S. Wilfridi*, *c.* 28; Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, 231–4; J.-M. Picard, 'Church and Politics in the Seventh Century: The Irish Exile of King Dagobert II', in J. M. Picard (ed.), *Ireland and Northern France, AD 600–85* (Blackrock, Co. Dublin, 1991), pp. 27–52.

schismatics by the new archbishop of Britain. If this was not enough of a threat, the invasion of Brega showed that Northumbrian ambitions now extended to the Irish mainland. The Northumbrians had ruled over the Isle of Man for half a century. It was a perfect spring-board for an attack on Ireland, as the Vikings would demonstrate. About this time, probably *c.* 686, Armagh declared its conversion to Roman orthodoxy. The way was now open for Armagh to defeat the internal threat from Kildare, just as the external threat from the English had come to an end with the battle of Nechtansmere. Armagh, not Kildare, was now to be the orthodox archbishopric of all Ireland. This is the position adopted, with only minor concessions to Kildare, in the Book of the Angel. An orthodox heir of the apostle of the Irish, in possession of Roman relics, and with the intention of using elements of the career of Palladius to buttress his case, might now be safe from enemies both inside and outside Ireland, both from Kildare and from the English.

The next section sets out the issues relating to the dating of the Irish texts drawn on in this chapter.

(V) THE DATING OF THE IRISH TEXTS RELEVANT TO THE ISSUE
OF AN IRISH ARCHBISHOPRIC

- (1) *Cogitosus, Vita S. Brigitae*. Cogitosus was Muirchú's spiritual father. His floruit may therefore be placed in the second half of the seventh century, since Muirchú was eminent in 697, to judge by his appearance as a signatory to *Cáin Adomnáin*. Cogitosus' use of the title 'archbishop' can best be explained on the basis that he wrote after the role given by Pope Vitalian to Theodore came to be known in Ireland (cf. Theodore's known Irish pupils) and before the conversion of Armagh to the Roman Easter. The latter occurred before the composition of the Book of the Angel. This suggests a date no earlier than *c.* 675.
- (2) *Liber Angeli*. Known to Tírechán, very probably in its present form, and therefore probably earlier than 693 (see Tírechán below). It post-dates Armagh's adoption of the Roman Easter. For this event there is no direct evidence. The Roman letter of 640 does not provide a *terminus ante quem* if the Segenus *presbyter* mentioned in the letter is Ségéne, abbot of Iona. The signatories would not, then, all have abandoned the Celtic Easter. It is arguable (see above) that it was after 678 (Wilfrid's expulsion from Northumbria); when he reached

Rome in 679 he must have assumed that the northern half of Ireland had not conformed to Roman paschal practice.

- (3) The addition to the *Liber Angeli* (c. 32 in Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, p. 190; but a very early addition to the *Volumen Patricii* which predates Tírechán)⁹⁰ depicting a situation in which Patrick and Brigit are 'the two columns of the Irish' and Brigit has a *monarchia* in her province. Presumably before the Testament of Áed of Sleaty, after which Armagh had definite claims within Leinster and therefore no later than 687.
- (4) The *idacht* (*audacht*) of Áed of Sleaty. Before, and probably not long before, 688 (the death of Ségéne, bishop of Armagh). Ségéne's successor, Flann Febla, is also involved. Tírechán knew that Sleaty was subject to Armagh but did not give, and may not have known, the details.
- (5) Tírechán's *Collectanea* are probably to be dated before 696, the beginning of the reign of Loingsech mac Óengusso, since he takes the supremacy of the southern Uí Néill dynasties descended from Conall Cremthainne for granted (cc. 10, 17, 18); also probably before 693, since he seems to assume that the king of Leinster belongs to the Uí Dúnlainge (c. 12). The reign of the Uí Dúnlainge king of Leinster, Bran mac Conaill maic Fáeláin, stretched from 680 to 693. It was preceded and followed by kings of the rival Uí Máil/Uí Théig dynasty. The date is probably after 688, since he refers to the recent plagues in the plural. Adomnán, writing c. 700, speaks of two major plagues in his lifetime (ii.46). These were presumably those of 664–6 and the one he dates himself, 686–8. If the second were the *mortalitas puerorum* of 683–4, the *terminus post quem* would only be shifted back by three years. The *Breviarium* (i.e. including the supplementary material, cc. 52–57, as well as Muirchú's Life) is probably to be dated after 684, since the second of the petitions of Patrick is likely to refer to the attack on Brega in that year.
- (6) Muirchú, *Vita S. Patricii*. Muirchú was one of the signatories to the Law of Adomnán in 697. He wrote his Life of Patrick at the request of Áed, bishop of Sleaty (*ob.* 700), presumably after the latter had subjected his church to Armagh (probably not long before 688, the death of Ségéne, bishop of Armagh, since the transaction seems also to have involved his successor, Flann Febla). To judge by Muirchú's

⁹⁰ Sharpe, 'Palaeographical Considerations', 21–2.

references to Áed, the latter was still alive when he wrote the Preface, perhaps the last part of the work to be completed. Tírechán apparently did not know Muirchú's work, and the reverse may also be true.

Probably, therefore, the *Vita* should be dated to the 690s.

Therefore these texts are likely to have been in the following sequence:

<i>c.</i> 675 × <i>c.</i> 686	Cogitosus
678 × 687	<i>Liber Angeli</i>
678 × 687	Paragraph on Brigit and Patrick added to the <i>Liber Angeli</i>
<i>c.</i> 685 × 688	Testament of Áed of Sleaty
<i>c.</i> 688 × 693	Tírechán
<i>c.</i> 695	Muirchú.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The origins and rise of the Uí Néill

From no later than the second half of the sixth century the Uí Néill, the descendants of Níall Noígíallach, ‘Níall of the Nine Hostages’, were the dominant dynasty in the northern half of Ireland. In the seventh and eighth centuries their lands extended in a broad arc from Inishowen in the north-west to the coastland north of Dublin in the eastern midlands (see Maps 1 and 6). To judge by the admittedly imprecise procedure of generation-counting, Níall, their eponymous ancestor, should have flourished in the middle of the fifth century. As we shall see, there is no strong reason to think that Níall himself ruled over anything more than an ordinary *túath*. His descendants had therefore risen with astonishing speed to the position of predominance they certainly held in the late sixth century. Any account of their rise and, even more, any explanation of its rapidity is, however, bedevilled by paucity of evidence and the uncertain value of what remains.

The very term ‘Uí Néill’ cannot be older than the sixth century, since it cannot have come into existence until the generation of Níall’s grandsons, and perhaps even his great-grandsons.¹ The most trustworthy guide to the chronology is the evidence we have in Adomnán’s Life about the founder of Iona, Columba. This can be checked against the independent information supplied by the Northumbrian historian Bede, and to some extent also against the sixth-century annals deriving from the Chronicle of Ireland. Figure 11.1 gives the genealogy of Cenél Conaill, down as far as the generation of Adomnán. Cenél Conaill was the branch of the Uí Néill to which the kings of most of what is now Co. Donegal (whose old name was Tyrconnell or Tír Conaill, ‘the Land of Conall’) belonged; but it also provided the majority of the early abbots of Iona. Columba was born in 521 or 522 according to Adomnán’s

¹ The first attestation, apart from anachronistic entries in the annals, is in the *Amra Cholúim Chille*, which refers to the land of Níall mourning the death of Columba (AD 597), ed. Stokes, §6.

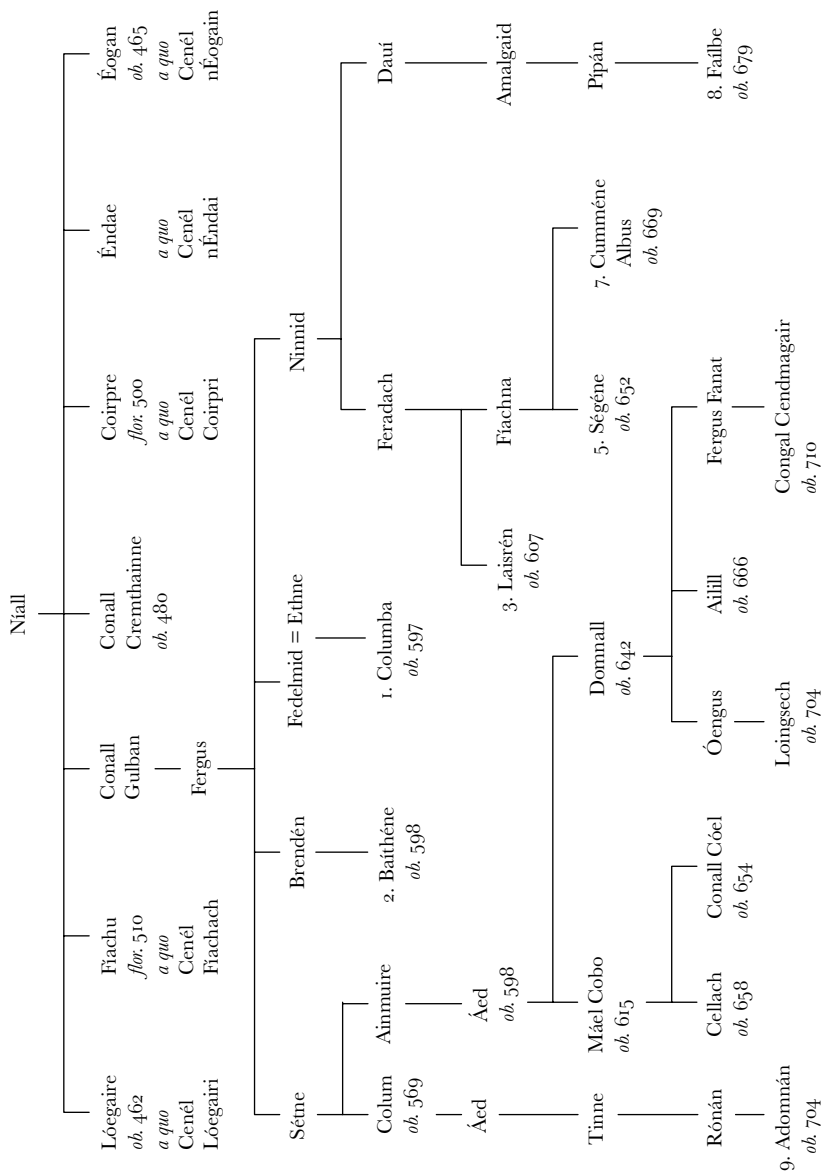


Fig. 11.1. Cenél Conaill and the abbots of Iona

figures.² This accords with the earlier obit of Columba's cousin, Ainmuire. The previous generation should therefore be put *c.* 530; that of Fergus Cendfhota *c.* 500 and Conall Gulban *c.* 470.

The floruits of Níall's sons should perhaps be set about 470–520. The evidence comes from the late fifth-century and early sixth-century annals. These are, however, of unknown origin and must therefore be discussed before any judgement is made about the origin of the Uí Néill. The known history of the annals has been set out above (see p. xix). Essentially, the starting-point is provided by Iona annals beginning probably within the lifetime of Columba. These were a source for the Chronicle of Ireland, which was compiled within the territory of the southern Uí Néill from *c.* 740 until *c.* 911. There seem, therefore, to be three possibilities. First, the fifth- and early sixth-century annals might be derived from an earlier chronicle put together at the time and later combined with the Iona annals to provide coverage of the period before Columba's voyage to Britain. Secondly, an Iona annalist might have extended his annals backwards, so that the entries before 563 were retrospective rather than contemporary. Thirdly, the annalists in the lands of the southern Uí Néill who continued the chronicle after *c.* 740 might themselves have supplied the entries for the period before the beginning of the Iona annals. It is important to note that these possibilities are not exclusive: for example, a southern Uí Néill chronicler might have extended his annals backwards, making use of an earlier source, but amplifying it from his own beliefs about the fifth and sixth centuries. If the evidence is found to point in more than one direction, that may well indicate some such combination of materials and outlooks.

The evidence can be seen as conflicting in precisely the way that has just been suggested. On the one hand, there are two considerations in favour of a late date. First, most of the entries centring on St Patrick have been written, or perhaps in some cases rewritten, to accord with the redating of Patrick's career to the middle years of the fifth century.³ Secondly, they also accord with the conception of Patrick as virtually the sole missionary to the Irish, an aspect of Patrician propaganda in the late seventh century.⁴ Thirdly, there is the question of the relationship between the annals for the period before and after the mission of

² Adomnán, *VSC*, Second Preface (4a): Columba was in his forty-second year when he went as a *peregrinus* to Britain, and this was the second year after the battle of Cúl Drebinæ. Columba's first year was therefore 522. ³ See above, pp. 212–14, 239–40.

⁴ Muirchú, *Vita S. Patricii*, ii.6 (ed. Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, 116); Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 10. 3, 18 (ed. Bieler, pp. 132, 138); Book of the Angel (ed. Bieler, pp. 184–90), *CIH* 226, 240, 527–9.

Palladius.⁵ If the earliest contemporary annals belong to the second half of the sixth century, it is perhaps easier to suppose that the extension backwards was a single effort bound up with the development of an agreed history for Ireland from the days of the Old Testament patriarchs onwards. This, however, appears to begin in the late seventh and eighth centuries.⁶ The pre-Palladian annals have been relatively neglected by historians because they were perceived as evidently unhistorical. Yet it is not obvious that 431 marks so clear a break between history and legend. One of the critical elements of the Patrician legend was that Patrick coincided in time with the eponymous ancestors of most of the main dynasties of Ireland; only so could he be believed to have determined the fate of dynasties by blessing, or cursing, their ancestors. Patrick had to be contemporaneous with the sons of Níall, and above all with Lóegaire, since those who wrote about Patrick were arguing persistently that, however elevated secular power might be, it was in the end weak when faced with the pre-eminent holy man of Ireland. Patrick was therefore made to arrive as a missionary soon after the beginning of Lóegaire's reign as king of Tara, and his early obit of 561 is within a year of Lóegaire's death.⁷

On the other hand, there are also reasons for suspecting that some genuine information is included in the annals for the late fifth and early sixth centuries. First, they do not appear to have been compiled at one date, whether early or late, but rather to have been reworked and amplified over a long period. Secondly, there are some linguistic forms which suggest a date of writing no later than the seventh century.⁸ These, however, occur in the sixth- rather than in the fifth-century annals. The strongest arguments are, in general, historical, except only that there is a distinct danger of circular argument: apparently sound information may enhance the credibility of the annals, and the improved repute of the annals may then render it easier to believe the information. The trouble here is that, if there are distinct strata in the annals, some produced close to the events and others not, the more reliable may bestow their respectability on the less.

⁵ These are usually, but inaccurately, termed the pre- and post-Patrician annals. The relevant chronological anchor was Prosper's notice of the mission of Palladius (see above p. 205).

⁶ See Carey, *The Irish National Origin-Legend: Synthetic Pseudohistory*, pp. 9–11.

⁷ Note also the obits of 467 for Benignus, Patrick's successor, and 481 for Íarlaithe, third bishop of Armagh (both in the Chronicle of Ireland).

⁸ Gen.sg. *Lochara* for OIr. *Luachra*, AU 535, confirmed by the doublet at 539, is the most remarkable, since syncope is usually dated to c. 550; J. Carney, 'Aspects of Archaic Irish', *Éigse*, 17 (1977–8), 423, cites this example and compares *Telcho*, AU 575, *Brudighi*, 578, *Lugide*, 591 and *Segusse*, 634. Cf. also *Reti* agreeing with Adomnán's form, as against OIr. *Riatat*, AU 507, and the name *Eugen*, AU 543, for OIr. *Éugan*, *Eogan*, Middle Ir. *Eógan*.

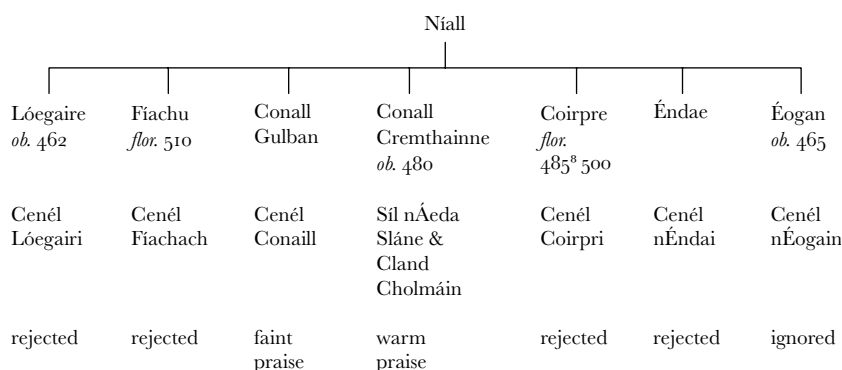


Fig. 11.2. Patrick and the sons of Níall

Seventh-century sources, such as Tírechán's *Collectanea* or the *Vita Prima* of St Brigit, accepted the contemporaneity of Patrick and the sons of Níall and also upheld the political claims of the descendants of Diarmait mac Cerbaill against two other Uí Néill dynasties, Cenél Coirpri and Cenél Fiachach.⁹ The focus of these texts was on the southern Uí Néill, although, to a lesser extent, they also recognised the political weight of Cenél Conaill.¹⁰ As for the southern Uí Néill, the hagiographers followed, more or less closely, the fortunes of the day. The result may be displayed as in figure 11.2. The most emphatic division between the elect and the reprobate among the sons of Níall comes between Conall Cremthainne and Coirpre, but Fiachu is also denounced.¹¹ The sharpness of the divide is all the more evident because it crosses one of the main territorial divides in Ireland: although Brigit had her interests within the lands of the southern Uí Néill, her main centre was in the province of Leinster, home to the principal enemies of the Uí Néill.

Moreover, the eighth-century Life of Áed mac Brice, the principal saint of Cenél Fiachach, tells by implication a similar story.¹² The Life presents Áed as a saint of the border between the Uí Néill and Munster,

⁹ Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 9–10; *Vita Prima Brigitae*, tr. Connolly, cc. 62–5.

¹⁰ Tírechán's treatment of Cenél Conaill is *Collectanea*, 47; it is important to note, however, that when Tírechán was recounting Patrick's cursing of Coirpre mac Néill and his blessing of Conall mac Néill, his Conall was Conall Cremthainne, ancestor of the main southern Uí Néill dynasties of Sí nÁeda Sláne, Cland Cholmáin Máir and Cland Cholmáin Bicc (the later Coille Follamain > Killallon, Co. Westmeath).

¹¹ For the complex evidence for this, see above pp. 28–9.

¹² The Life is one of the 'O'Donaghue group' argued by Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives*, pp. 297–339, to belong to the eighth century. This Life has one historical dating feature, namely its implication in § 18 (ed. Heist, *Vitae*, p. 173) that Sí nÁeda Sláne was the leading royal lineage among the southern Uí Néill. This would hardly be possible after the battle of Seredmag in 743.

with churches on both sides, a saint who made peace between kings when asked, but otherwise had as little to do with them as possible: 'Kings were always hostile to him, but by divine power they were compelled to obey him.'¹³ The church which is named in the Life was situated in his mother's native kingdom of Múscraige Tíre, in the north-west corner of Munster, looking west across the Shannon into southern Connaught and northwards into the lands of Uí Néill client kingdoms.¹⁴ Not one of his churches among the Uí Néill, his father's kindred, is named, neither Rahugh (Ráith Áeda maic Bricc, 'Áed mac Bricc's fort'), the most prominent of his foundations in the annalistic record, nor Killare, adjacent to the site of Uisnech, the traditional centre of Ireland and of Mide, the 'Middle Land'.¹⁵ There is another significant silence in the Life: it admits that Áed's father was of the Uí Néill, but does not explain to which branch he belonged.¹⁶ According to the genealogies of the saints, however, he was a member of Cenél Fiachach.¹⁷ Whether true or not, this certainly accords with the situation of his principal churches. Uisnech was where Patrick met Fiachu, according to Tírechán, while Rahugh may have been on the edge of the territory called 'the Men of Churches', Fir Chell – the lands of Cenél Fiachach, many of which were given away to found great monasteries.¹⁸ If the situation of Killare is considered side by side with the story of the meeting between Fiachu and Patrick at Uisnech, it becomes very tempting to believe that Fiachu's rule had extended further north from the later kingdom of Cenél Fiachach to include the heart of Meath, and that the situation of Killare reflected this wider kingdom. This temptation is reinforced by the obvious comparison with Coirpre mac Néill. His meeting with Patrick was situated at that other traditional site, Tailtiu, the pre-eminent place of assembly of the Uí Néill. Its significance is underlined by Tírechán when he makes Patrick reject Coirpre at Tailtiu and then give his full backing to Connall Cremthainne

¹³ 'Reges enim erant semper immites ei, sed divina virtute ei obedire cogeabantur', *Vita S. Aidi Killariensis*, § 38 (Heist, *Vitae*, p. 178). For peace-making, *ibid.* §§ 8–9, 29 (Heist, *Vitae*, pp. 169–70, 176).

¹⁴ Enach Midbren, *Vita S. Aidi*, § 7, ed. Heist *Vitae*, p. 169; c. 4 in Plummer, *Vitae*, i.36; Plummer, *ibid.*, ii.326, points out that there are three Annaghs among the townland names of the barony of Lower Ormond.

¹⁵ These, together with Slieve League in south-west Co. Donegal, were his main churches: cf. *Fél.* 10 Nov., Notes.

¹⁶ *Vita S. Aidi*, c. 1 (ed. Heist, *Vitae*, p. 167; note that on the maternal side, the text says not just that his mother was of the people of Munster, but that she belonged to Múscraige Tíre).

¹⁷ *CGSH* 9, 441; *Fél.*², Notes, 10 Nov. The text has him as 'the champion of the seed of Conn Céthatach', only the note (from *F*) specifies that he was of Cenél Fiachach.

¹⁸ Fir Chell included Druim Cuilinn, Druncullen, N 18 06, only a mile and a half from Kinnitty (*Fél.* 21 May, Text and Notes); Birr was on its border (*Fél.*², Notes, 29 Nov.).

at the nearby *Ráith Airthir*, a major early 'seat of kingship' for the southern *Uí Néill*.

When the early annals are examined, these temptations become even stronger. Once non-Irish entries have been set aside, it becomes apparent that the *Chronicle of Ireland* had certain themes in the early period. For the first generation after 431, the centre of interest is on Patrick and also on *Lóegaire*, not only in relation to Patrick but also to the cattle-tribute paid by the Leinstermen. The second theme is the high-kingship of *Ailill Molt*, not one of the sons of *Níall* but the grandson of *Níall's* brother, *Fiachrae*. He is credited with defeating the Leinstermen at the battle of *Brí Éile*, *Croghan Hill*, in the north-west of Co. Offaly, a site with close associations with St Brigit.¹⁹ So far, the centres of interest have been the traditional early kings of Tara, but after *Ailill Molt's* death in 482, the pattern is blurred. The next king of Tara in the king-lists was *Lugaid*, son of Patrick's sparring-partner, *Lóegaire*, but the person who did the fighting according to the early annals was *Coirpre mac Néill*.²⁰ This disparity in the *Chronicle of Ireland* is rendered all the more suspect by the inclusion of *Coirpre* in the earliest list of the kings of Tara, *Baile Chuinn*.²¹ With *Lugaid*, and also with his predecessor and second cousin, *Ailill Molt*, the kingship of Tara had moved on from the generation of *Níall's* sons to that of his grandsons. The struggle with the Leinstermen, however, was still apparently led by the sons.

The annalist record of *Coirpre* is confused for two reasons. First, some wished to claim his victories for *Muirchertach* grandson of *Éogan mac Néill*.²² A more serious difficulty is the conflict between two identifications of the *Coirpre* in question. This affects both his record and that of an *Eochu mac Coirpri*. This can best be shown by setting out three of the annals, placing in brackets material peculiar to the *Annals of Ulster* and in italics material peculiar to the *Clonmacnois annals*:

485

The kalends of January. The first battle of *Granaiert*. *Coirpre* was victor (in it *Finchath* fell. Or *Mac Ercae* was victor as some say.)

494

The kalends of January. The battle of *Tailtiu* was won by *Coirpre* son of *Níall* against the Leinstermen.

¹⁹ Grid ref.: N 48 33. AU 475 (also 473, *H²*, and 478); cf. *Bethu Brigte*, ed. Ó hAodha, line 165; *Fél.*² Notes, 25 April.

²⁰ *Lugaid* son of *Lóegaire* is prominent only in the *Clonmacnois annals*, not in AU, and there is no certainty, therefore, that he had a major role in the *Chronicle of Ireland*: see *CI* s.aa. 482, 484, 507. ²¹ See below, pp. 484–5. ²² AU 485.

495

The kalends of January. The second battle of Granairt in which fell Fróech son of Finchad, king of the Leinstermen *Desgabair*. Eochu son of Coirpre was the victor.²³

What we appear to have is the record of a duel between Coirpre and Finchad, and between their sons, Eochu and Fróech. Two considerations suggest that the Coirpre of all these entries, and not just the one of 494, was the son of Níall. First, in Tírechán's *Collectanea*, Granairt was the name of the episcopal see of Northern Tethbae, one of the kingdoms of Cenél Coirpri.²⁴ The name is preserved in the modern Granard, Co. Longford.²⁵ This suggests that the annals are giving us a record of the taking of northern Tethbae by Coirpre mac Néill. Once that is admitted, there is the further argument that the Coirpre of 485 and 495 is most naturally identified with the Coirpre mac Néill of 494. Tailtiu is where Tírechán's Patrick found, and cursed, Coirpre mac Néill; the annal for 494 thus accords entirely with Tírechán in perceiving Coirpre as the son of Níall most closely identified with the taking of Tailtiu, one of the principal royal sites of Brega.

On the other hand, the second hand in AU (namely its original owner, Cathal Mac Maghnusa) gave a genealogy for Eochu mac Coirpri: 'Eochu son of Coirpre son of Ailill son of Dúnlang son of Éndae Nia'.²⁶ The implication is that the battle was an internal Leinster affair, between Dál Messin Corb, on the one hand, and the rising star of Uí Dúnlainge on the other. Connected with this identification is the rendering in the Annals of Tigernach and *Chronicum Scotorum* of AU's Granairt by Graine, possibly Graney near Castledermot near the southern border of the later Uí Dúnlainge territory,²⁷ and also the claim by the Clonmacnois annals, s.a. 495, that Eochu was king of southern Leinster, not the whole of Leinster. The chronology of this version is, however, impossible to reconcile with the standard genealogy of the Uí Dúnlainge, according to which a grandson of Ailill mac Dúnlainge should have lived in the early seventh century.²⁸ The identification of Findchad as belonging to Dál Messin Corb is much more plausible, since that *gens* had already lost power by Tírechán's day.²⁹ As we shall see, the later pro-Uí Dúnlainge

²³ I have omitted the annals in AT and CS equivalent to 497 and 499 recording further victories by Coirpre; they are discussed below in relation to the career of Fiachu mac Néill.

²⁴ Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 16.7.

²⁵ Cf. *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, ed. C. O'Rahilly, line 214; VT² 996.

²⁶ AU 495.

²⁷ Hogan, *Onom.*, p. 449, under Gráine. The grid reference is s 81 84.

²⁸ CGH i.74 (124 b 32ff.), where no Eochu appears among the sons of Coirpre.

²⁹ Tírechán assumes that the Uí Dúnlainge are the royal dynasty of Leinster. The only other effective contenders in his day were Uí Máil, to which Cellach Cualann (*ob.* 715) belonged.

Leinster king-list admitted that Findchad's son, Fróech, killed at the second battle of Granairt in 495, was king of Leinster.³⁰ The best interpretation, therefore, is that these annals were initially intended to record two different things about Coirpre mac Néill and his son Eochu: first, their taking of the kingdom later known as Coirpre Tethbae; and secondly, Coirpre's acquisition of the royal site in Brega later associated with his name, Tailtiu.

What trust should be placed in this evidence is a difficult matter. It is at least clear that the annalist is not concerned to denounce Coirpre and thereby to play the political tune of the powerful Uí Néill dynasties of the seventh and eighth centuries. Two odd features, however, are the distance between Granard and Tailtiu and the omission of any reference to the kingdom of Cenél Coirpri most plausibly seen as taken from the Leinstermen, the one which gave its name to the modern village of Carbury in the north-west of Co. Kildare.³¹ As for the kingdom of Coirpre which is mentioned, Coirpre Tethbae, the very neatness of the situation envisaged evokes suspicion: the founder of the dynasty, Coirpre, takes the ecclesiastical centre of Coirpre Tethbae. As Professor Byrne observes, there is always the possibility that the name Coirpre is being used for the people, just as in the historical books of the Old Testament, the names of the sons of Jacob are used without further ado for the tribes of Israel, or the name of Amalek for the Amalekites.³² On the other hand, the son, Eochu, was not the ancestor of the later kings of Cenél Coirpri.³³ One difficulty in the way of the annal for 494 commemorating Coirpre's victory at the battle of Tailtiu is the annals' own record of the victories of Coirpre's brother Fiachu mac Néill. As they stand, the annals suggest that Coirpre had won the battle of Tailtiu in Brega several years before Fiachu took the province of Mide, further west. Fiachu's conquest provides, however, the next main theme of the early annals in the *Chronicle of Ireland*, in the first two decades of the sixth century.

If Coirpre and his son Eochu were the enemies of Findchad mac Garrchon of Dál Messin Corb, Fiachu's opponent was Failge Berraide, the eponymous ancestor of Uí Fhailgi, the ruling dynasty of the north-west corner of Leinster.³⁴ The confrontation accords well with later political geography: the kingdom of Cenél Fiachach, on the north side

³⁰ *LL* i.181.

³¹ Grid ref.: N 69 34.

³² Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, p. 81.

³³ See Appendix, Table vi.

³⁴ The name was revived in the modern Co. Offaly (for King's County), but their territory was restricted to the eastern part of the modern county, and their principal royal seat was at Ráith Ingáin, the modern Rathangan, just within the borders of Co. Kildare.

of Slieve Bloom, shared a frontier with the Uí Fhailgi which lay close to the modern town of Tullamore. On the other hand, the protagonists, Fiachu and Failge were both ancestors of dynasties which were to be excluded from provincial kingship. Their early pre-eminence may have reflected local geography and local loyalties; it certainly did not arise out of the later importance of their descendants.

The Chronicle of Ireland's record of Fiachu's struggle with Failge needs to be put alongside other annals concerning further victories ascribed to his brother Coirpre mac Néill, preserved in the Annals of Tigernach and *Chronicum Scotorum*, but not in the main hand of the Annals of Ulster, and also an annal on a crucial victory won by Coirpre's grandson, Túathal Máelgarb, in 535:

497

The battle of Slemain of Mide against the Leinstermen was won by Coirpre son of Níall.

499

The battle of Cend Ailbe against the Leinstermen was won by Coirpre son of Níall.

510

The battle of Frému was won by Failge Berraide against Fiachu son of Níall.³⁵

516

The battle of Druim Derg against Failge. Fiachu was the victor. Then the plain of Mide was taken from the Leinstermen.

535

The battle of Lúachair between the two estuaries, won by Túathal Máelgarb against the Cíannacht.³⁶

Some of these battles can be plausibly located. Slemain of Mide was also the site of a major battle in the saga *Táin Bó Cúailnge*; the name is preserved in the modern townlands of Slanemore and Slanebeg, a few miles north-west of Mullingar.³⁷ Frému or Frémainn is probably Frewin Hill, a mile and a half to the north of Slemain.³⁸ Cend Ailbe is similarly reminiscent of saga: according to *Scéla Muicce Meic Dathó*, the head of the hound Ailbe, who gave her name to Mag nAilbe in Co. Carlow, was commemorated by a place in Meath called Áth Chinn Chon, the Ford of the Head of the Dog. The place is also mentioned by Tírechán. Cend Ailbe may be the same place, or close to it if the ford was close to another site named after Ailbe. Druim Derg has not been located, but the others all appear to be within Mide and may thus be regarded as parts, or variants, of a single story, the conflict between the Leinstermen and the sons of Níall over Mide and Brega.

³⁵ Under the year corresponding to AU 506 in AT and CS.

³⁶ In AU the second hand, *H*² (Cathal Mac Maghnusa), placed them under 499 and 501.

³⁷ Grid refs.: N 36 56 and N 38 55. ³⁸ Grid ref.: N 37 58.

There are, however, some differences between the stories of Coirpre and Fiachu embodied in these annals. The pair of entries which was certainly in the Chronicle of Ireland opposed Fiachu and Failge in particular, but the other two portrayed the battles as being between Coirpre and the Leinstermen in general. Although those about Coirpre may not have been in the Chronicle of Ireland, their standpoint on this point is consistent with another entry which certainly was, namely the annal for 494, which recorded the battle of Tailtiu won by Coirpre, again against the Leinstermen in general. The only difference is topographical: Tailtiu was in Brega, while the action in the other entries was further west, in Mide. The annals for 497 and 499, therefore, stand midway between the annal for 494, where the Leinstermen were defeated in Brega, and those for 510 and 516, in which Fiachu was fighting, unsuccessfully at first, against Failge Berraide in Mide. As we have seen, the place where Coirpre was said to have defeated the Leinstermen in 497 was only a mile and a half from where Failge defeated Fiachu in 510.

The battle of 535, won by Túathal Máelgarb over the Cíannacht of Brega, accords with the battle of Tailtiu topographically, and also dynastically, in that Túathal was the grandson of Coirpre. Of all these early entries in the Chronicle of Ireland, this is one of the most intriguing. The form of *Lúachair* suggests a very early date of recording, within two or three generations of the event; like his grandfather, Túathal Máelgarb was the object of denunciation by later writers; the Cíannacht Breg were to become one of the principal vassal peoples of the southern Uí Néill; and, finally, the manner in which the battle is named (*'Lúachair between the two estuaries'*) suggests local knowledge.³⁹ This is the battle which, for the Chronicle of Ireland, completed the conquest of Brega. Thus, whereas, for him, the conquest of Meath was finally accomplished by Fiachu mac Néill, the conquest of Brega was begun by Coirpre and finished by his grandson. The whole process was portrayed as taking some forty years, from the last decade of the fifth century to the third decade of the sixth.

At the outset of this chapter, we identified two related issues. First there was the question of the evidence: when were these early entries in the Chronicle of Ireland written, and by whom? The second was the issue of reliability: could the story they told be accepted as a more or less trustworthy guide to the origins of Uí Néill power in the midlands of

³⁹ *Lúachair* is a common place-name element; the two estuaries in question were probably either those of the Boyne and the Nanny, or the Nanny and the River Delvin, all of which lay close to the main church of the Cíannacht Breg at Duleek.

Ireland? In answer to the first question, we may now conclude, first, that at least the entry for 535 belongs to the phase of the textual tradition associated with Iona, that is to say with the period *c.* 550–*c.* 740; secondly, that, for the group of entries associated with Coirpre and Fiachu as a whole, their topographical focus of interest suggests a connection with the monastery of Durrow, founded by Columba, which lay very close to Rahugh and possibly within the early kingdom of Cenél Fiachach. The information need not have been recorded at Durrow itself, for there was enough interchange of personnel between Durrow and Iona to make it easy to suppose an annalist working on Iona, but with intimate knowledge of Mide and Brega.⁴⁰ Moreover, if we do accept this theory of the entries concerning the conquest of Mide and Brega, it also becomes likely that they were written before the middle of the seventh century. First, there is the linguistic evidence on Túathal Máelgarb's victory in 535, already discussed; secondly, there is the contrast with the late seventh-century standpoint of Adomnán, for whom Diarmait mac Cerbaill and his son Áed Sláne were central to the history of the southern Uí Néill,⁴¹ and who omits any mention of Coirpre and Fiachu or of their descendants in the midlands. This was not because of any political antipathy: he wrote sympathetically about a king of Cenél Coirpri (probably based in the modern Co. Sligo), in a way quite contrary to the stance espoused by Tírechán.⁴² Adomnán, therefore, reflects, like Tírechán but in a much less strident and committed form, the hegemony of the descendants of Conall Cremthainne, a son of Níall whose only achievement recorded in the *Chronicle of Ireland* was to die.⁴³

The second issue was that of reliability. Here a cautionary note should be struck. Both the linguistic and the textual arguments agree in assigning a relatively high degree of trustworthiness to the annal entry of 535 recording the victory of Túathal Máelgarb over the *Cíannacht Breg*. Although the linguistic evidence for early recording extends back as far as 507, it does not apply to the entries concerning the conquest of Mide and Brega, other than that of 535. Furthermore, one might take two views of the coincidence between the two battles of Slemain, one a victory of Coirpre mac Néill over the Leinstermen, the other one of the greatest battles of saga, won by the Ulstermen of Conchobar mac Nessa against the Connachta.⁴⁴ The annal might be supposed to be dependent

⁴⁰ For example, Laisrán mac Feradaig, the third abbot of Iona, accompanied Columba in Ardnamurchan in Adomnán, *VSC*, i.12, but was in charge of Durrow in i.29.

⁴¹ Adomnán, *VSC*, i.14, 36. ⁴² *Ibid.*, i.13.

⁴³ AU 480 (it was in the *Chronicle of Ireland*).

⁴⁴ *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, ed. C. O'Rahilly, lines 3585–869.

on the saga; or, on the contrary, it might be claimed that Slemain was the site attributed to the battle in the saga because it was already known as a place where a famous battle had been fought. Even if we suppose a Columban annalist working in the second half of the sixth or the first half of the seventh century, the dates he gives for events in the late fifth and early sixth century are likely to have been guesswork. We cannot, for example, assume that the dates of 510 and 516 for the battles between Failge and Fiachu are anything more than approximately correct. Certainty on these issues is unattainable; what can be said with little fear of contradiction, however, is that no one was able to claim that either Conall Cremthainne or his descendants were responsible for the great conquests that paved the way for Uí Néill dominance in Brega and Mide. The objects of historiographical favour from the late seventh century onwards could only assert that they were the divinely approved beneficiaries of victories won by others.

There is one final piece of evidence in favour of the essential truth of the claim made by the Chronicle of Ireland that Fiachu and Coirpre took Brega and Mide from the Leinstermen: an inscription, MAQI CAIRATINI AVI INEQAGLAS (OIr. 'Mac Cáirthinn aue Enechglais'), found just over three miles south-south-west south of Slane, and seven miles north-north-east of Tara close to Seneschalstown House.⁴⁵ This has been used to throw light on an obscure annal in the Chronicle of Ireland and on an even more obscure poem. We may take the annal first:

446

AU, AClon, CS

The kalends of January. The battle of Femen, in which Mac Cáirthinn son of Cóelub son of Níall fell.⁴⁶ Some say that he was of the Cruithni.

The reason for the opinion quoted in the last sentence of the annal is very probably the notion that Mac Cáirthinn was a son of the Cóelub who gave his name to the ruling lineage among Dál nAraidi, namely the Uí Chóelbad. Yet if this were true, his nephew, Eochaid mac Condlai maic Cóelbad, would die almost a hundred years later, in 553. The Cóelub of Dál nAraidi was not the son of Níall, the paternity claimed for our Cóelub by the Clonmacnois annals. The latter claim, however, is itself likely to be another subsequent interpretation of the original

⁴⁵ CIIC no. 40; found approximately at N 947 692 in a field on the west side of the road just to the south of Seneschalstown Ho. (but no longer kept at the site): R. Cochrane and J. Rhys, 'Notes on the Newly-Discovered Ogam-Stones in County Meath', *JRSAL*, 38 (1898), 53–60. Cf. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, p. 137.

⁴⁶ On this battle and its location, see D. Ó Corráin, 'Topographical Notes, II. Mag Femen, Femen, and Some Early Annals', *Ériu*, 22 (1971), 97–99; Mac Airt, *Annals of Inisfallen*, p. 589.

annal, by then obscure, for its probable significance is revealed by the Rawlinson genealogies, which include a Cóeldub among the sons of Níall Noígíallach.⁴⁷ The name Cóeldub is often confused with Cóelub; and this is the only Cóelub or Cóeldub mac Néill in the Rawlinson collection. It perhaps fits topographically in so far as the fifth-century annals claim that Lóegaire was already established at Tara, close to the Femen of Brega. Yet we have already seen that the descendants of Níall probably secured lordship over Brega only in the period 494–535. Both of these suggestions, either attributing Cóelub to the Dál nAraidí or placing him among the sons of Níall, are thus best treated as later guesses, rendered highly improbable by chronological difficulties.

The Mac Cáirthinn of the inscription was, however, a descendant of Enechglas, an extremely rare name which appears as that of the eponymous ancestor of a Leinster dynasty, the Uí Enechglais. For that reason, the Mac Cáirthinn who died at Femen (the one in Brega, apparently close to Tara) has also been identified with a Mac Cáirthinn mentioned in a poem on the kings of the Leinstermen who ruled Tara, a poem attributed to Laidcenn mac Bairceda of Dál nAraidí:

The boy-king, Móenech, a great offspring,
took the walls of a great plain;
Mac Cáirthinn, succourer in battle,
succourer of poetry, the modest offspring.⁴⁸

The poem gives us, however, no patronymic; this is unfortunate, for Mac Cáirthinn is not a particularly rare name. Moreover, it does not mention Findchad mac Garrchon, the Leinster king whom we have already met in the Chronicle of Ireland, and who was defeated by Coirpre mac Néill far to the west at the first battle of Granard (in Co. Longford).⁴⁹ Given the situation of that battle and its date, one might have expected a patriotic Leinster poem on the kings of the province who had ruled over Tara to have included Findchad and his son Fróech. The reason is probably that the author of the poem is primarily a supporter of the Uí Bairrche, and secondarily a supporter of the dynasties which traced their descent

⁴⁷ CGH i.133 (139 b 52) = 'The Laud Genealogies and Tribal Histories', 291 (Coildub), a reference which I owe to Philip Irwin. This section of the genealogies appears to derive from a collection made at Armagh c. 1000: E. Mac Neill, 'Notes on the Laud Genealogies', *ŽCP*, 8 (1911), 411–18. There is no reason to think that the annals and genealogies, one compiled at Clonmacnois, the other at Armagh, are textually related.

⁴⁸ CGH i.8–9; the relevant verse is lines 47–8 (ed. K. Meyer, *Abhandlungen der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, 1913, *Über die älteste irische Dichtung. I. Rhythmische allitierende Reimstrophen*, Phil.-hist. Klasse, no. 6, Berlin, 1913, 18). Meyer points out (p. 15) that the ascription is certainly false.

⁴⁹ AU (and Chronicle of Ireland) 485; his son Eochu was likewise defeated in 495.

Table 11.1. *Leinster king-list*

<i>LL</i> i.181	<i>De Regibus Lagenorum</i> (CGH i.8–9; cf. CGH i.335)
1. Bresal Bélach	Bresal Bélach
2. Éndae Cendselach	Muiredach Mo Snithech
3. Crimthann mac Éndai	Móenech
4. Fróech mac Findchada	Mac Cairthinn
5. Illand mac Dúnlainge	Nad Buidb
6. Ailill mac Dúnlainge	
7. Cormac mac Ailella	
8. Coirpre mac Cormaic	
9. Colmán Már mac Coirpri	
10. Áed Cerr mac Colmáin (Uí Máil)	

from Catháer Már. The evidence can be seen from putting the king-lists together with an outline genealogy of the ruling families of Leinster in the fifth and sixth centuries (see table 11.1). Nos. 6–10 of the *LL* king-list appear to be simply a pedigree of the *Uí Dúnlainge*, together with a king of a rival line, *Uí Máil*, Áed Cerr mac Colmáin, made to appear as if he belonged.⁵⁰ The genealogy in fig. 11.3 puts in capitals the kings, from Bresal Bélach onwards, who are listed in the poem (with Roman numerals for the sequence), and in lower case with arabic numerals the kings of the Book of Leinster king-list.

It is immediately apparent that the poem is more stringent than the later king-list in excluding those who were not descendants of Catháer Már, namely those who were not reckoned to be among the group of dynasties which dominated Leinster from *c.* 720 onwards. The poem is usually dated to the seventh century, at which date the *Uí Máil* shared the kingship of Leinster; yet no king of their line is mentioned.⁵¹ On the other hand, within the group of dominant lineages in subsequent centuries, the poem also betrays a definite standpoint: the *Uí Dúnlainge* and *Uí Chenselaig* shared the kingship of the province; yet, apart from the common ancestor, also shared by *Uí Dega*, no one of either *Uí Dúnlainge* or *Uí Chenselaig* is allowed to have ruled Tara. The later king-list from the Book of Leinster is a complete contrast: it includes someone from the *Dál Messin Corp*, but otherwise is, for this period, an

⁵⁰ Áed Cerr's obit is given by the Clonmacnois annals under the year corresponding to AU 595.

⁵¹ Meyer, *Älteste irische Dichtung*, i.16.

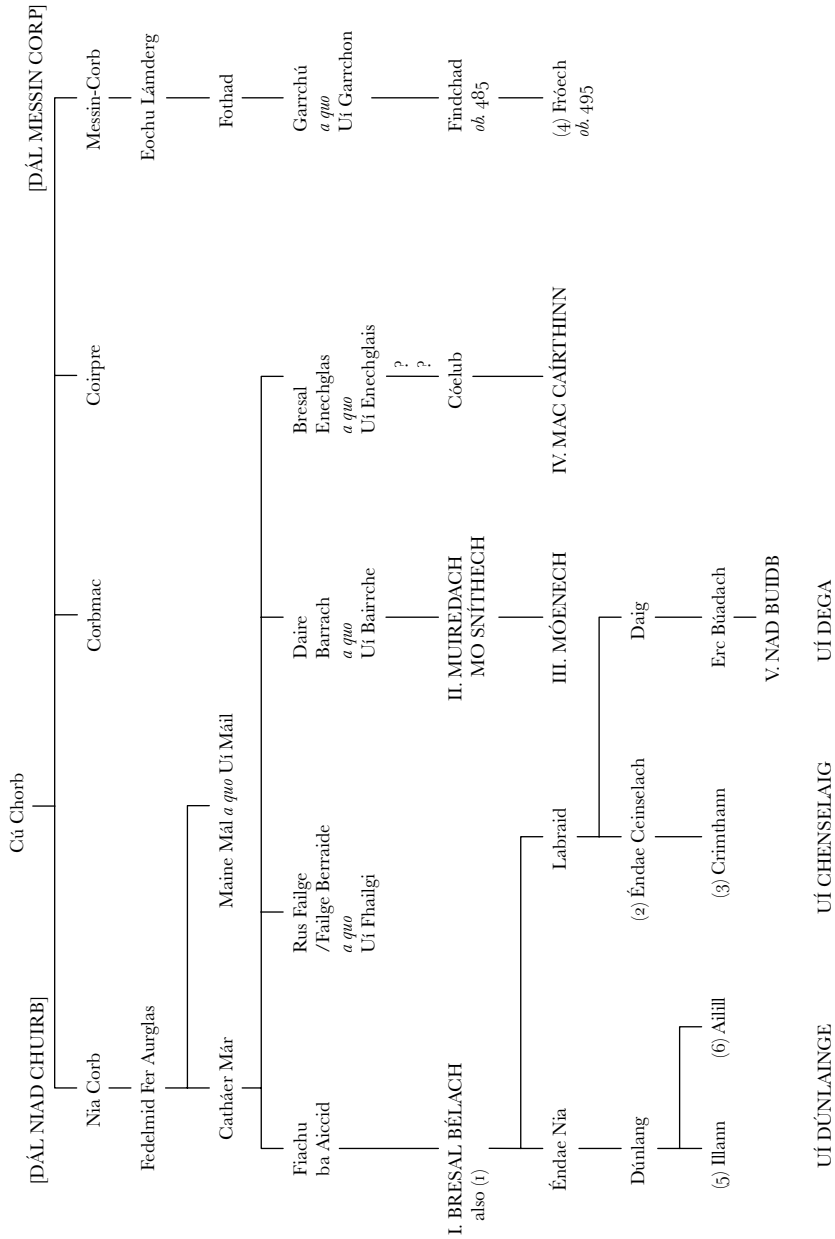


Fig 11.3. Early Leinster

obvious champion of the *Uí Dúnlainge*.⁵² A reasonable inference is that the poem was composed in the interests of one of the dynasties claiming descent from Catháer Már other than *Uí Dúnlainge* and *Uí Chenselaig*. The obvious candidates are *Uí Bairrche* and *Uí Dega*, the first with two out of the Leinster kings who had ruled Tara, the second with the last such king. On the whole *Uí Bairrche* is the stronger candidate, because of the inclusion in the poem of a father-and-son pair from that dynasty, Muiredach Mo Sníthech and Móenech.

Once it is admitted that the poem was composed to advance the claims of the *Uí Bairrche*, this is all the stronger evidence that it includes a Mac Cáirthinn who was not of that dynasty and may well be the descendant of Enechglas commemorated in the inscription (itself situated, it will be remembered, about seven miles north-north-east of Tara). The descent given to Mac Cáirthinn in the genealogy above assumes, however, not just that the Mac Cáirthinn of the poem was the Mac Cáirthinn of the inscription, but also that he was the Mac Cáirthinn of the annal for 446. In that way it was possible to name both the father (Cóelub came from the annal) and the grandfather (Enechglas came from the inscription). The identification may seem unduly venturesome, although it has the support of notable scholars.⁵³ Unfortunately, the inscription, on the face of it the strongest item of evidence, has one linguistic feature which suggests a sixth- rather than a fifth-century date.⁵⁴ Otherwise there is a poem not composed in order to enhance the standing of Mac Cáirthinn in particular, and also an annal which (*via* the place-name Femen, easily misunderstood to refer to the better-known Femen close to Cashel),⁵⁵ puts a Mac Cáirthinn's death in battle in the very area where the inscription is to be found. A certain scepticism may be justified, especially because of the missing final -i in INEQAGLAS[I], but for fifth-century Ireland, this is an unusual array of evidence.

The claim implicit in the poem is that Leinster kings ruled Tara well

⁵² P. Walsh, 'Leinster States and Kings in Christian Times', *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, 53 (1939), 57, notes that a portion of the regnal list is simply an *Uí Dúnlainge* pedigree.

⁵³ D. Ó Corráin, 'Topographical Notes – II. Mag Femen, Femen, and Some Early Irish Annals', *Ériu*, 22 (1971), 97–9, Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, p. 137; Mac Airt, *Annals of Inisfallen*, p. 589.

⁵⁴ The lack of a final -i in INEQAGLAS[I] suggests that apocope had already occurred. Of the other possible explanations, one, namely wear to the stone, is not the case (see Rhys in Cochrane and Rhys, 'Notes on the Newly-Discovered Ogam Stones', 57: 'there never was anything after *glas*: there the surface is smooth, and in no way worn into a depression'); what remains is an error on the part of the man who incised the inscription. If apocope had occurred, the inscription cannot be dated before the sixth century, since apocope appears to have been a sixth-century sound-change: see McManus, *A Guide to Ogam*, pp. 53 (§ 4. 7) and 94 (§ 5. 26 (c)). ⁵⁵ As it was by AI s.a. 447; cf. 573.

into the fifth century. This claim flatly contradicts the notion that Lóegaire mac Néill was king of Tara when Palladius came to Ireland, but is supported by the annals recording the conquests of Coirpre, Fiachu and Túathal Máelgarb. The best guess is, therefore, that Coirpre, Fiachu and Túathal Máelgarb were indeed, from *c.* 490 to *c.* 535, the conquerors of the midlands.

In this field, a brief pleasure at the thought that we have some secure ground on which to tread is rapidly replaced by the realisation that one conclusion gives rise to more difficulties. If the conquest of Mide and Brega took place in the opening decades of the sixth century, what are we supposed to make of the Chronicle of Ireland's entries concerning not just Lóegaire mac Néill, already king of Tara in the 430s, but also his successor Ailill Molt? Moreover, if the sons of Níall did indeed win all this territory in the midlands, how did they do it? And, thirdly, if we are to believe that a Columban monk who had lived at Durrow wrote some entries concerning the fifth and early sixth centuries in the second half of the sixth, or the first half of the seventh, century, which of the entries in the Chronicle of Ireland for that period may be attributed to him? Moreover, why does the Chronicle of Ireland not tell us of the rise to power of Cenél Conaill, Columba's own kindred? The Chronicle agrees with Adomnán's *Life of Columba* in its picture of Cenél Conaill from 550 to 650; and the absence of any account of the origins of the dynasty is thus all the more puzzling.

Lóegaire mac Néill was one of those rare men in early Irish history whose fame was secure even though his descendants were politically second-rate. We have already seen how a few shreds of evidence about Coirpre and Fiachu survived because of an unusually early and geographically well-positioned annalist. Lóegaire's historical reputation is similar in one respect to those of Coirpre and Fiachu: the topographical situation of his descendants was crucial. Because Tara was the outstanding symbol of overriding power in the midlands, and because the kingdom of Cenél Lóegairi lay at the gates of Tara and was, in the event, to be excluded from the overkingship of the Uí Néill as well as the kingship of Tara, Lóegaire became an ideal hagiographical foil for the British missionary Patrick. Lóegaire's reign was placed early in order to allow for his confrontation with a Patrick who had himself had to be put back by a generation so as to elbow Palladius from the limelight.

It can be argued that Lóegaire is unlikely to have been a son of Níall at all. Indeed, if we accept that he was active when and where the

sources say he was, he can scarcely have had the father they all assign him. It is not credible that Níall should have fathered one son who was already king of Tara when Patrick is said to have arrived as a missionary in 432, and another son who took Meath from the Leinstermen in 516. Nor is it credible that the power of the sons of Níall should have extended over Brega by 430 and still need to be won by a battle of Tailtiu in 494 and consolidated by the conquest of the Cíannacht in 535. Yet all the sources, whether they are annals, king-lists or laws, agree that Lóegaire was king of Tara when Patrick was converting the Irish.⁵⁶

One way out of this contradiction is *via* the possibility of adoption. Children could be adopted under Irish law; by an extension of the same practice so could a dynasty. And just as adoption could take different forms, some more advantageous to the adoptee than others, so might political adoption allow the adopter to define the conditions of the new alliance. When the sons of Níall, therefore, took Mide and Brega from the Leinstermen, they had to come to terms with the peoples over whom they now ruled. The story of the Battle of Crinna records a later version of one such agreement: Tadg son of Cían, we are told, did most of the fighting on behalf of an ancestor of Níall and his sons; in return he was offered as much land as his chariot could travel round in a single day. He thought in his heart that he could, in this way, take possession of Tara and Tailtiu, and, with them, the kingship of Ireland, but by a cunning device he was cheated out of his prize.⁵⁷ The Cíannachta were not reckoned as either Uí Néill or Connachta. On the other hand, although the Airgíalla were not accounted Uí Néill, they were part of Dál Cuinn, almost certainly, as we shall see, by a process of political adoption. The same process, therefore, might allow Lóegaire, or rather his descendants, to be Uí Néill, even though he himself lived at too early a date for it to have been possible that he was a biological son of Níall.

A different way out of the chronological difficulty is to allow that Lóegaire was a full brother of Coirpre, Fiachu and the others, but to deny that he ever fulfilled anything like the role assigned to him in the Patrician legend. He cannot have been king of Tara in the fifth century because the Uí Néill had not yet taken Brega from the Leinstermen. The chronological problem of Lóegaire may thus be seen as an offshoot of the redating of Patrick. Lóegaire may thus be one of the genuine sons

⁵⁶ *CIH* 226, 527, *Baile Chuinn*, § 10, ed. and tr. G. Murphy, 'On the Dates of Two Sources Used in Thurneysen's *Heldensage*', *Ériu*, 16 (1952), pp. 146, 148. ⁵⁷ *Cath Crinna*, *CGH* i.403–5.

of Níall, and may even have been involved in the conquest of Brega; but this took place in the half-century between 490 and 540, not a hundred years earlier in the first decades of the fourth century. In that case, the annals concerning Lóegaire cannot be attributed to the Columban annalist. They are likely to have been added to the Chronicle of Ireland when it was being continued in the midlands. One might then explain the coexistence of an early and a late obit for Patrick as arising from a late date given by the Columban annalist and an early date inserted between *c.* 740 and 911.

Ailill Molt is a more difficult problem, partly because of a natural reluctance to dismiss anyone's claims to the kingship of Tara if he was not of the Uí Néill. So complete was the latter's domination of the midlands from the sixth century until the Viking era that only the odd fragment of evidence survives suggesting that anyone other than a descendant of Níall was ever acknowledged as king of Tara. However, the annalistic evidence for Ailill Molt's career is not, for the most part, in the text shared by both the Annals of Ulster and the Clonmacnois group, but either in material found only in *Chronicum Scotorum* or in entries derived by the Annals of Ulster from the Book of Cuanu, a lost chronicle, perhaps of the early ninth century, from the church of Louth (material not common to AU and a chronicle of the Clonmacnois group is indented, italicised if from a Clonmacnois text, in roman if from AU).⁵⁸

463
AU, CS

The kalends of January. *The beginning of the reign of Ailill Molt son of Nath Í.*

467
AU, CS, AClon

1. The kalends of January. The repose of Bishop Benignus, *successor of Patrick*.
2. The Feast of Tara was held by Ailill Molt. (Thus I have found in the Book of Cuanu.)⁵⁹

468
AU, CS, AClon

1. The kalends of January. Bishop Isserninus dies.
2. The battle of Dumae Achir, that is, Ailill Molt was defeated (as I have found in the Book of Cuanu).⁶⁰

⁵⁸ For this period the Annals of Tigernach, the fullest of the Clonmacnois group, are lacking.

⁵⁹ These entries are two years apart in CS, the Feast of Tara being under the year corresponding to AU 469, where it is also added by *H*² (compare also 470 in AU). They are also separated in AClon, but by how much is not clear.

⁶⁰ This is entered in CS under the year corresponding to AU 474, where it is also entered by *H*² in AU.

469
AU, CS

1. The kalends of January.

2. *The Feast of Tara [was celebrated] by Ailill Molt.*

470
AU, CS

1. The kalends of January.

2. The Feast of Tara [was celebrated] by Ailill Molt, as some say.

475
AU, CS

The kalends of January. The battle of Brí Éile won by Ailill Molt over the Leinstermen. (So I have found in the Book of Cuanu.)⁶¹

478
AU

The kalends of January. The battle of Brí Éile.⁶²

482
AU, CS

The kalends of January. The battle of Oche in which Ailill Molt fell *at the hands of Muirchertach son of Erc and of Lugaíd son of Lóegaire and of Fergus Cerrbél son of Conall Cremthainne and of Fiachrae Lonn son of Cóelub, king of Dál nAraidi*. From Conchobar son of Ness to Cormac son of Art 308 years; from Cormac up to this battle 116, as Cuanu wrote.

The principal difficulty in the way of accepting the historicity of the reign of Ailill Molt as king of Tara is the way it fits into a scheme, the initial starting-point of which was a reign-length and date for Lóegaire mac Néill designed to accommodate an early Patrick. A further element of this scheme was a reign for his son, Lugaíd, which conveniently provided another king of a rejected dynasty, his father's shadow, who died 'after he had rejected the Adze-Head', Patrick.⁶³ It seems as if, for the annalists, Lugaíd mac Lóegairi was the foil for the Patrick who died in 493, just as his father had been for the Patrick who died in 461. Ailill Molt, however, had a reign flanked by Lóegaire and his son; so far as the king-list was concerned, he kept bad company (see table 11.2).

The topographical indicators are no more favourable than the chronological. Ailill Molt is said to have been defeated in one battle, that of Dumae Achir, and victorious in another, that of Brí Éile, before dying at the hands of a coalition of all his rivals. Dumae Achir, however, was the name given by the Annals of Tigernach to a much later battle in 628, in which Crundmáel, nicknamed 'Sack of Ashes', was killed by Fáelán mac

⁶¹ AU also has the battle of Brí Éile under 478; *H²* places it s.a. 473, and *CS* has it under the year corresponding to 473. ⁶² See under 475 above.

⁶³ *AT*, *CS* under the year corresponding to AU 507.

Table 11.2. *Kings of Tara*

1. Lóegaire	429–62	XXXIII (XXX)
2. Ailill Molt	463–82	XX
3. Lugaid	483/4–507	XXV
4. Mac Ercae	508–34	XXVII (XXIV)
5. Túathal Máelgarb	535–44	X (XI)
6. Diarmait mac Cerbaill	545–65	XXI

Colmáin of the Uí Dúnlainge; this latter encounter was an internal Leinster affair, and the site, therefore, presumably within Leinster.⁶⁴ Similarly Brí Éile, the site of a battle won by Ailill Molt, which was in the Chronicle of Ireland, lay within the Leinster kingdom of Uí Fhailgi. What these battle-sites reflect is the later pattern of Uí Néill attacks on Leinster south of the Liffey and the Rye, rather than the conflict of the late fifth and early sixth century, which took place in Mide and Brega.

It is worth considering for a moment what the likely implication is of the possibility that Ailill Molt was not king of Tara, but was included in the list at a later period. His recognition as king of Tara would then be part of the same construction of the past that made his father, Nath Í, into another king of Tara, following Níall Noígíallach. Both Nath Í and Ailill Molt came from the same branch of the Connachta, Uí Fhíachrach. There seem to be two possible explanations of their presence in the list of kings of Tara. First, such a recognition must imply that the Uí Néill needed to court the favour of Uí Fhíachrach, and, therefore, such a need must have occurred when Uí Fhíachrach were still the most powerful dynasty among the Connachta, that is to say, no later than *c.* 707, the accession of Muiredaig mac Muirgiusa of Uí Briúin Aí, the founder of the later ruling branch of Síol Muiredaig. If the king-list is correct, he initiated a string of six representatives of Uí Briúin Aí before the next king of the Connachta from Uí Fhíachrach, Ailill mac Inrechaig (*ob.* 764).⁶⁵ It is a corollary of this explanation, therefore, that the construction, within the Chronicle of Ireland, of the king-list of Tara so as to include two of the Uí Fhíachrach occurred when the annals were still being written at Iona. One might appeal to the bishop of

⁶⁴ The battle is not named in AU, CS or ACLon., which I take to cast considerable doubt on whether that was indeed the name of the battle of 628, but to leave us with the fact that a later annalist regarded it as a plausible place for a battle between the Uí Dúnlainge and their rivals. Hogan, *Onom.*, cites RIA Stowe MS D.2.2, fo. 18^{a2}, ‘Dumach Aichir i nUib Felmida i lLaignib’.

⁶⁵ See Appendix, xxiv.

Armagh's position at the head of the ecclesiastical signatories of *Cáin Adomnáin* in support of the idea that Iona already, by the end of the seventh century, accepted the Patrician legend; in that case, the fifth-century annals, constructed on the basis of the Patrician legend, and including Ailill Molt, might be as old as the end of the seventh century, and, on the argument from the political fortunes of Uí Fhíachrach, these annals could not very well have been much later than 700. This argument thus produces a place and date of composition: Iona, *c.* 700.

Another explanation is, however, possible and does not require us to suppose that the fifth-century annals were as early as the seventh century. One thing which is notable about Ailill Molt is that neither of the leading branches of Uí Fhíachrach (Uí Fhíachrach Múaide and Uí Fhíachrach Aidne) was descended from him. This creates the suspicion that Nath Í and Ailill Molt attracted the attention of annalists fundamentally loyal to the Uí Néill precisely because they were neither ancestors nor members of the currently dominant branch of the Connachta. In the eighth and ninth centuries that branch was Uí Briúin Aí. By favouring the claims of Uí Fhíachrach to a share of the kingship of Tara in the past, it was possible to acknowledge the high rank of the Connachta and the claims of kinship between them and the Uí Néill without giving the Uí Briúin too definite a claim in the present. As we shall see, there is good evidence that the Uí Néill were willing to make an acknowledgement of such a nature from the early eighth century onwards.⁶⁶ This second explanation of Nath Í and Ailill Molt is perhaps preferable, because it is less constricting when it comes to dating the fifth-century annals, and it allows us to assign them to the period when the Chronicle of Ireland was being continued in Brega, an area of clear Armagh influence.⁶⁷ On the other hand, it does raise the question why, if a politically safe acknowledgement of the claims of the Connachta in general, but not of the Uí Briúin in particular, was indeed the explanation of the supposed kingship of Nath Í and Ailill Molt, the annalists did not prefer to advance the pretensions of the Uí Ailella. They were the only one of 'the three Connachta' whose kings were never admitted to the later king-list of the Connachta; one might have supposed that they were the safest of all.

We have arrived, then, at a position in which the earliest annals to be attributed to the Iona annalist are those around 500 recording the victories of Coirpre and Fiachu, sons of Níall Noígíallach, while the entries concerning Lóegaire, an early fifth-century Patrick (with his supposed

⁶⁶ See below, 508–12, 515, 518.

⁶⁷ Stewards of Armagh in Brega are recorded in the annals at AU 814.1; 888.3; 894.1.

successors as bishops of Armagh, Benignus and Íarlaithe), Ailill Molt and Lugaid mac Lógairi may be dated to the eighth or ninth century. Only the former have much chance of being literally true, although the latter are, of course, of great importance as part of the later combined legend of Patrick, the apostle of the Irish, and Lóegaire, the pagan king of Tara.

What remains to be discussed is the way in which the hegemony of the Uí Néill may have been won. Here it is worth drawing a sharp distinction, more familiar to historians of north-west Europe in the late Roman and post-Roman periods than it is to historians of Ireland, between the warfare of peoples and the warfare of the *comitatus*. The warfare of peoples is the one familiar to us from the annals of the eighth and ninth centuries, from the laws and from the *frithsholad* texts. We may take one example of this last category of evidence as representative: the poem of *c.* 700 which upholds the claims of the Airgíalla against their overlords, the Uí Néill. The poem accepts without question the obligation of the Airgíalla to do military service in the armies of the Uí Néill. It is implied that those armies were largely composed of contingents supplied and led by kings of client peoples. What the poet is concerned to do, therefore, is to limit an accepted service owed by kings and peoples. On the other hand, early sagas and hagiography both bear witness to another form of warfare based on the *fian*, the Irish counterpart to the *comitatus* familiar to historians of Anglo-Saxons, Scandinavians, Franks and Lombards.⁶⁸ The crucial characteristics of the *comitatus* are, first, that its bonds are not those of a member of a people to its ruler but of a sworn follower to his leader; and, consequently, that the *comitatus* may be recruited from men of different peoples. The *fian* was different in one respect from its counterpart in neighbouring countries: there the Christian Church assimilated and reconstructed the *comitatus* of the past, but in Ireland the *fian* was condemned outright not just for its violence but also for its explicit paganism. For this reason, perhaps, the *fian* was not prominent as a form of military organisation in the eighth and ninth centuries.⁶⁹ Although these two forms of military organisation are distinct, they may be combined in various ways. The early Anglo-Saxon king recruited his *ministri regis*, 'thegns', partly from young noblemen of other kingdoms;⁷⁰ when Alboin, king of the Lombards, led his army to

⁶⁸ Sharpe, 'Hiberno-Latin *Laicus*, Irish *Láech* and the Devil's Men', and McCone, 'Werewolves, Cyclopes, *Díberga*, and *Fianna*'.

⁶⁹ Hence the condemnation by AU, s.a. 847, of a *fianlach* (*fian* + *slúag* 'host') of 'sons of death of the Luigni and the Gailenga who were plundering the peoples in the manner of the heathens'.

⁷⁰ Bede, *HE* iii.14, on Oswine of Deira.

the conquest of northern Italy in 569, his forces included not only his own Lombards but also numerous Saxons;⁷¹ most strikingly, the army assembled by Alaric, which included others apart from Goths, formed the nucleus of a new *gens*, that of the Visigoths.⁷² As this last example shows, a warband might become a nation, and thus the lord of a *comitatus* could be transformed into the king of a people, a *rex gentis*.

With these possibilities in mind, we may take another look at the fragmentary and uncertain evidence for the rise of the Uí Néill in the sixty years from 475 to 535.

It must be repeated at the start that the term 'Uí Néill' cannot have come into existence until the time of Túathal Máelgarb and Díarmait mac Cerbaill, both great-grandsons of Níall Noígíallach. While the stage was still dominated by Níall's sons, it was not dominated by the Uí Néill. For that very reason, if we accept the fundamental truth of the annalistic entries about Coirpre and Fiachu, we must accept the possibility that their victories were not won by an existing royal dynasty. Whatever the nature of the claims acknowledged by including Nath Í and Ailill Molt among the early kings of Tara, one thing is clear enough: in the period covered by trustworthy annals, none of the Connachta apart from the descendants of Níall ever made good claims to rule the lands east of the Shannon – Mide and Brega.⁷³ Yet what would a son of Níall have replied if a contemporary had the temerity to ask 'what is your kindred?' To judge by the later pedigree of Níall (the alliances of whose descendants mattered far too much for his pedigree to be literally true), Coirpre or Fiachu would have replied, 'I am an *ae Muiredaig*', yet these Uí Muiredaig are never mentioned. Still less do we know what people they might have ruled. The sons of Níall belonged to the *gens* (or, perhaps, group of *gentes*) of the Connachta: in the earliest poems about Columba of Iona he is still regarded as *moccu Chuinn*, a member of the *gens* which took its name from Conn. Yet a *gens* in the sense in which Adomnán used that term usually only comprised the noble element among a particular people or *túath*. If we then ask to what people the sons of Níall belonged, the only possible answer is the Féni – yet they included the Éoganachta of Munster as well as all the principal peoples of the northern half of Ireland, apart from the Ulstermen and their neighbours, the Cruithni and Dál Riata.

A further clue to the rise of the Uí Néill is the distribution of the

⁷¹ Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* v.15.

⁷² P. Heather, *Goths and Romans, 332–489* (Oxford, 1991), esp. 313–18.

⁷³ Even if we suppose that Cenél Maini, the ruling dynasty of southern Tethbae, was an offshoot of the Uí Maini of Connaught, following Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-kings*, p. 92.

territories of the Gailenga, the Luigni and the Corcu Āir Thrí.⁷⁴ All three included kingdoms in northern Connaught as well as in the midlands.⁷⁵ In their Connaught lands, these three groups were overshadowed by their neighbours to the west, Uí Āiachrach Múaide. Two views have been taken of this connection between northern Connaught and the midlands. It has been suggested that the eastern kingdoms of the Gailenga, Luigni and perhaps Corcu Āir Thrí were founded by contingents in the armies of the sons of Niall.⁷⁶ Yet it has also been argued that these connections may be due to earlier phases of dynastic migration, which would then provide the context for Uí Néill conquests. The principal reason given for taking this view is the extent of the lands of the Luigni, Gailenga and Āiannachta: they had taken too large a proportion of the fertile lands of Mide and Brega.⁷⁷ In other words, on this second view, the geographical distribution of the Luigni and the others reflects an earlier military conquest, perhaps not unlike that of the Uí Néill themselves.

This argument may, however, appear less strong, first, if we restrict ourselves to the Gailenga, Luigni and Corcu Āir Thrí, and avoid including the Āiannachta. The latter, composed principally of the Āiannacht Breg and the Āiannacht Glinne Geimin (around Dungiven in Co. Londonderry), appear to be a quite different case: first because, in 535, Túathal Máelgarb conquered them, rather than conquering others with their aid, and, secondly, because the Āiannacht Glinne Geimin were probably not brought firmly under the power of the Uí Néill until the late sixth century at the earliest. True, the genealogists proposed to

⁷⁴ The Corcu Āir Thrí appear sometimes as a *gens* within the Luigni, and this connection is reflected by the eighth-century text *Scéla Éogain ocus Cormaic*, which tells a story about Lugnae Fer Trí and his role in fostering Cormac mac Airt, the supposed great-great-great-grandfather of Niall Noigiallach and the pre-eminent heroic king of the Uí Néill and Connachta: T. Ó Cathasaigh, *The Heroic Biography of Cormac mac Airt* (Dublin, 1977), pp. 56–7 (discussion), 121 (text), 125–6 (tr.); also ed. and tr. O Daly, *Cath Maige Mucrama*, pp. 68–9. Similarly Lugnae Fer Trí is also the representative figure for both the Luigni and the Corcu Āir Thrí in *The Book of Lecan*, ed. K. Mulchrone (Dublin, 1937), 224 Rc26 = *The Book of Ballymote*, ed. R. Atkinson (Dublin, 1887), 196 b 16.

⁷⁵ Corcu Āir Thrí (Corcu Urthri, Corcu Thri); see AU 657.1: ‘Obitus Subne macc[u] Urthri, abb Iae’; 994.1: ‘Fogurtach m. Diarmada, ri Corco Thri, do marbad do Ghalengaibh Coraind’. The presence of the same *gens* near Kells is attested by the place-name Druim Corcortri, VT² 777. The Gailenga included the Gailenga Móra who gave their name to the later barony of Morgallion, Co. Meath, Gailenga Becca on the north side of the Liffey opposite Dublin (Glasnevin was in their territory: Hogan, *Onom.*), Gailenga Collumrach, AU 884.7, perhaps neighbours of the Gailenga Móra, and Gailenga in Coraind, neighbours of the Luigne of Connaught (Corand seems to have been the area to the west of the R. Unshin). The diocese of Achonry gives their twelfth-century boundaries: *ibid.*, pp. 507–8. For changes in these territories see below, n. 81.

⁷⁶ Byrne, *Irish Kings and High Kings*, 68–9.

⁷⁷ D. Ó Corráin, review of F. J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings* in *Celtica*, 13 (1980), 157–8.

group all these peoples, Luigni, Gailenga and Cíannachta, together with the Éili of North Munster.⁷⁸ Yet the likelihood is that this merely reflects the later status of these peoples (apart from the Éili) as relatively privileged clients of the Uí Néill. The doctrine was that they were an early offshoot of the royal line of the Éoganachta, and thus of agreeably high genealogical status; but, as immigrants from Munster, they were not entitled to overkingship in the North. Leaving aside the Cíannachta, therefore, we are still left with the argument that 'if they were fighting men of the Uí Néill who were rewarded with territory . . . one can only say that they were so grossly overpaid that their masters had very little after they had met their bills'.⁷⁹ This objection is, however, effective only against one particular version of the theory put forward by Mac Neill, namely that which would compare the Luigni and their fellows to late-medieval mercenaries from the Hebrides and Argyll.⁸⁰ But common membership of a *comitatus* was not the same as mercenary service; indeed, equality in the share-out of booty and land may have been a fundamental corollary of its openness to men from different nationalities.⁸¹ Moreover, the argument is less strong if we take account of the likelihood that the later baronies of Lune and Morgallion (representing the Luigni and the Gailenga Móra) were not identical with the early medieval kingdoms. The latter were further west, and the move eastwards is likely to have been associated with the expanding power of the Uí Briúin Bréifne in the post-Viking period, and also with the decline of Cland Cholmáin.⁸² Provided we accept that the sons of Níall conquered the midlands with the aid of *fianna* rather than mercenaries, Mac Neill's theory can stand.

It is, however, worth considering the implications of the theory a little

⁷⁸ CGH i.168–71, 246–9. ⁷⁹ Ó Corráin, review of Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, p. 157.

⁸⁰ Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, p. 69.

⁸¹ Cf. Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* ii.27; James, *The Franks*, p. 82.

⁸² The reliable evidence for the early territories of the Luigni and the Gailenga is not extensive. CIIC 41, from the old churchyard at Castlekeeran to the west of Kells, commemorates one COVAGNI MAQI MUCCI LUGUNI (cf. McManus, *A Guide to Ogam*, § 6.18), which suggests that they were already in the area no later than the beginning of the sixth century; VT² 827–31 suggests that the Luigni were neighbours of the Delbnae Assail (the identification of Domnach Mór Maige Echnach with Donaghmore near Navan rests on the later barony of Lune and does not fit the text of the Tripartite Life). AU 847.2, associates Inis Muinnremair, presumably a crannóg on Loch Muinnremair, Lough Ramor, Co. Cavan, with a *fian*-band of the Luigni and Gailenga. The church of Fore, Co. Westmeath, seems to have been connected with the Gailenga and the Luigni: CS s.a. 814: 'Forcellach Fobair, do Gailengaib Móra'. On the other hand, the Irish Life of St Féichín of Fore (ed. and tr. W. Stokes, RC 12 (1891), 318–53) says that Fore belonged to the Luigni and that Féichín himself came from the Connaught Luigni; and this is confirmed by AU 993.5, the obit of Máel Finnia, heir of Féichine and bishop of the peoples (*tiúatha* of the Luigni). The likelihood is that the territory of the Luigni of Mide extended approximately from Castlekeeran to Fore, and that the lands of the Gailenga Móra lay on their north side, including Lough Ramor.

further. The first and most obvious corollary is that the sons of Níall recruited their *fianna* from northern Connaught. This accords precisely with an element in the legends about their hero-king, Cormac mac Airt, born of a single night's liaison with a druid's daughter, fostered by a wolf in the manner of Romulus and Remus, but also by Lugnae Fer Trí, a combined representative of the Luigni and the Corcu Fir Thrí. It also accords with the need to recognise the earlier claims of the Uí Fiachrach to a share in the kingship of Tara, exemplified by the kingship of Nath Í and his son Ailill Molt. Finally, it also helps to explain the continued involvement of the Uí Néill with northern Connaught throughout the sixth century.⁸³

The best guess is, therefore, that the midlands were initially conquered by Coirpre and Fíachu, acting as the leaders of *fianna* rather than as the kings of peoples. Their conquests were consolidated by Túathal Máelgarb's defeat of the Cíannacht Breg in 535, but the rewards of their victories were taken by their kinsman, Diarmait mac Cerbaill and his descendants. They left as a memorial, first, the scattered kingdoms of Cenél Coirpri, from Co. Sligo to the north of Co. Kildare via Co. Longford, and secondly, an enduring need for the beneficiaries of their conquests to blacken their name by the supremely authoritative agency of the apostle of Ireland, Patrick.

⁸³ AU (and in the Chronicle of Ireland) 547.3, 561.1, 603.2; compare also the death of Ailill Molt's son Mac Ercae in battle at Tortu, in Brega (Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 51), in 543 (AU) or 547 (the Clonmacnois annals); cf. also CGH i.153 (143 a 8–9) which implies that there was a branch of Cenél Lógairi with lands immediately to the south-west of Lough Erne, close to branches of Cenél Coirpri and Cenél nÉndai and north-east of Callraige and Luigne. To judge by VT² 881–2, Cenél nÉndai had landed interests in Airtech (approximately the parish of Tibohine, Co. Roscommon; the village is M 67 92).

CHAPTER TWELVE

The kingship of Tara

(I) PERCEPTIONS OF TARA

About 800 Óengus mac Óengobann, Óengus the Culdee, contrasted the present glories of the great churches with the empty silence in the former fortresses of Ireland:

The burdensome fortress of Tara
perished with the fall of her princes;
with a full complement of venerable champions
great Armagh endures.

The Faith has grown;
it will endure till the Day of Judgement;
guilty pagans are carried off;
their forts are not inhabited.

The Fort of Crúachain has vanished
together with Ailill, offspring of victory;
fair is the dignity, superior to princes,
which dwells in the seat of Clonmacnois.¹

Óengus identified Tara, Crúachain (also Crúachu) and the rest as pagan sites and as royal fortresses. His poem is a valuable demonstration of one way in which the opposition between the past and the present, between paganism and Christianity, could be combined with a further contrast, between military might and spiritual power. His contemporary point is driven home a few stanzas later, when he refers to the king of Tara, Donnchad mac Domnaill of Cland Cholmáin, to his brother-in-law, Bran, king of Leinster (both of whom had just died), and to Máel Rúain, the saintly abbot of Tallaght:

¹ *Fél.*², p. 24. For an important recent reappraisal of the written evidence, see E. Bhreathnach, 'Temoria: Caput Scottorum', *Ériu*, 47 (1996), 67–93.

Donnchad, wrathful, red, chosen,
 or victorious Bran of the Barrow:
 visiting their tombs
 does not rid me of the trouble of weakness.

Máel Rúain, after reverent service,
 the great sun to the south of the plain of Mide:
 at his grave with purity
 is healed every heart's sigh.²

Óengus was not a mere mocker of the vanished glories of paganism, but a critic of military overlordship, of the kings of his own time. His true target was less the Tara of the past than the Tara of the present.

This image of a pagan fortress, which by 800 was perhaps only a group of undulations in the grass, is that customary weapon of argument, a half-truth. Tara is a complex site on a low ridge in Co. Meath, about 22 miles north-north-west of Dublin.³ It has only been partially excavated, but what has been done shows that it has a history going back to the Neolithic period, and stretching as far as the Iron Age;⁴ no one has yet demonstrated that any structures of significance survived into the Christian period. Another site which Óengus contrasted with the great churches was Navan Fort, Emain Machae. This has been excavated and has been shown to have a similarly long history, ending apparently as a great religious sanctuary in the first century BC.⁵ A careful survey of the area of Crúachain has shown how it contained a great number of sites, many of which were probably religious.⁶ In portraying these places as pagan and ancient, therefore, Óengus appears to have been telling no more than the truth, but they may never have been fortresses, and to that extent his contrast between failed military

² *Fél.*², p. 26.

³ The grid reference is N 92 59. For a summary of the archaeology and topography of the site, see C. Newman, *Tara: An Archaeological Survey*, Discovery Programme Monographs, 2 (Dublin, 1997); E. Bhreathnach, *Tara: A Select Bibliography*, Discovery Programme Reports, 3 (Dublin, 1995), 27–33; M. J. Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Meath* (Dublin, 1987), Map 27 B (p. 229) provides an index to the inventory numbers.

⁴ Wailes, 'The Irish "Royal Sites" in History and Archaeology', 10–12. The publication of the excavations by Ó Riordáin and De Valera in the 1950s is forthcoming through the Discovery Programme.

⁵ Waterman, *Excavations at Navan Fort 1961–71*, esp. pp. 209–30; summarised in Mallory and McNeill, *The Archaeology of Ulster*, pp. 146–50.

⁶ Herity, 'A Survey of the Royal Site of Cruachain in Connacht. I'; idem, 'A Survey of the Royal Site of Cruachain in Connacht. II'; idem, 'A Survey of the Royal Site of Cruachain in Connacht. III'; and cf. idem, 'Motes and Mounds at Royal Sites in Ireland'.

force and victorious spiritual power was true of the present rather than of the past.⁷

The limitations of his standpoint are revealed by two entries in the annals:

An assembly of the synods of the Uí Néill and the Leinstermen in the *oppidum* of Tara, at which were present many anchorites and *scribae* led by Dublitter (AU 780.12)⁸

The community of Columba goes to Tara to excommunicate Áed [Oirdnide]. (AU 817.8)⁹

At the very time when Óengus portrayed the glories of Tara as vanished, as the symbol of mere force and past paganism, it was the site chosen for the greatest synod of the age, almost certainly by Donnchad mac Domnaill, the very king of Tara whom Óengus disdained. It was also so far identified with the power of the Uí Néill that the community of Columba, shortly after the building of the 'new monastery' of Kells,¹⁰ went some twenty miles south-east to Tara to excommunicate a king of the 'burdensome fortress', a king who was of the northern Uí Néill, that is, whose own territory lay about 130 miles north-west of Tara. The ridge of Tara may have consisted then, as it does today, of grass, but it was more than merely a matter of legend.

Tara, if men portrayed it in suitable ways, might buttress their arguments and even their ritual actions. As Patrick was the point of reference for many a view of the Christian past, so Tara encapsulated the power and the glory of kings. As we saw in the last chapter, it was natural to combine these two tales and make Patrick the arbiter of the fate of kings and the hero who triumphed over Lóegaire mac Néill, king of Tara, and his druids. This combination is not just found in the supposedly fifth-century annals, but, most notably, in Muirchú's Life of Patrick:

⁷ The three sites, Tara, Crúachain and Emain Machae, were grouped together, as early as the seventh century, in a piece of verse attributed to Senchán Torpéist, *CGH* i.23 (118 b 16–17), ed. and tr. K. Meyer, *Über die älteste irische Dichtung. II. Rhythmische allitierende reimlose Strophen*, Abhandlungen der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1913, Phil.-hist. Klasse, no. 10 (Berlin, 1914), p. 20, and in another early poem attributed to Laidcenn mac Bairceda, *CGH* i.8 (116 c 9, 15–16), also ed. Meyer, *Über die älteste irische Dichtung. I.* no. 1; in the verse attributed to Senchán Torpéist, the word used is *dind* 'eminence' rather than *dún* 'fort', but the latter is used in the (probably slightly later) poem attributed to Laidcenn mac Bairceda. This is not to say that there were not 'ringforts' associated with these sites (such as 'the Rath of the Synods' at Tara); if the Rath of the Synods had a defensive function, and if it was the last structure to be occupied, that might explain the tendency of later writers to perceive Tara as a fortress.

⁸ This is also in AClon, s.a. 773, and was therefore in the Chronicle of Ireland (AT and CS are here lacking). ⁹ Similarly AClon, s.a. 814.

¹⁰ AU 807.4; for the context see Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, pp. 68–71.

In the days when these things took place, there was in the aforesaid lands a certain great, fierce and pagan king, an emperor of the barbarians, ruling in Tara, which was then the head of the kingship of the Irish, Loíguire by name, the son of Níall, the starting-point of the royal lineage of almost the entire island.¹¹

There assembled the kings, satraps, leaders, princes and the nobles of the people; also the druids, incantators, fortune-tellers, and the inventors and teachers of every skill and craft were summoned to Loíguire, as once to Nabuchodonosor, in Tara, their Babylon . . .¹²

There is much artful literary stylisation in these two passages, both Roman and biblical. Lóegaire is the emperor of the barbarians, to be contrasted with the emperor of Rome, but he is also the Irish Nabuchodonosor (Nebuchadnezzar, but, for the purposes of the feast, combined with Belshazzar, his son), presiding in his palace at Tara as Nabuchodonosor sat in glory in Babylon.¹³ This comparison might have been used to suggest that the present glories of the Uí Néill were as nothing compared with those of the past:

Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the king of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory . . . And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee.¹⁴

The reference in Muirchú to Tara as ‘then the head of the kingship of the Irish’ might seem to accord with such a depreciation of the present;¹⁵ yet this is difficult to reconcile with his characterisation of Níall Noígíallach as ‘the starting-point of the royal lineage of almost the whole island’.¹⁶ However stubborn Lóegaire might have been in his paganism – and there were different stories about that – he had to represent present power, the power of c. 700, since the purpose of the legend was to assert the spiritual authority of the heirs of Patrick over the Uí Néill and, through the Uí Néill, over Ireland; hence the notion that one

¹¹ Muirchú, *Vita S. Patricii* (c. 700), i.10; I take *origo* to refer to Níall rather than to Lóegaire. The latter was certainly not the ‘origo stirpis regiae huius pene insulae’. Bieler translates ‘by name Loíguire son of Níall, a scion of the family that held the kingship of almost the whole island’. In my opinion it is better to allow that Muirchú failed to preserve concord between Neill (g.sg.) and *origo* than to translate the latter by ‘scion’; cf. i.9, ‘episcopum Amathorege nomine’, with Amathorege, abl.sg., in apposition to *episcopum*. The past tense ‘held’ is not in the original and is misleading. ¹² Ibid., i.15. ¹³ Binchy, ‘The Fair of Tailtiu and the Feast of Tara’, 131.

¹⁴ Daniel 2:37, 39.

¹⁵ Note, however, that *tunc* (‘then’) is not in one of the manuscripts of Muirchú’s Life, namely the Book of Armagh.

¹⁶ Muirchú, *Vita S. Patricii*, i.10, including the difficult phrases, ‘Loíguire nomine filius Neill, origo stirpis regiae huius pene insulae’, for which see above, n. 10.

royal lineage ruled over almost the whole island, and the further notion that Tara was the head, the *caput* or capital, of the Irish. What Muirchú claimed for the heirs of Patrick was a supremacy over the Irish, and thus for Armagh spiritual authority over Tara; and, since the power of the Uí Néill, provided they were dutiful supporters of Armagh, would be a principal prop of the authority of the heir of Patrick, his assertion that they were 'the royal lineage of almost the whole island' is not surprising.¹⁷

As a prehistoric site serving as a capital, Tara was not an isolated case.¹⁸ By the late eighth century, a branch of Síl nÁeda Sláne, the Uí Chonaing, had adopted one of the Boyne Valley Neolithic passage-grave mounds, Knowth, as what one text calls a 'seat of kingship'.¹⁹ Crúachain had the same status for an entire province. In 783, the king of the Connachta, Tipraite mac Taidg, and Dub dá Lethi, abbot of Armagh, promulgated the Law of Patrick over the Connachta. Elsewhere, in 799, such an action is described in the succinct words 'Lex Patricii for Connachta la Gormgal mac Dindataig', 'The Law of Patrick [is proclaimed] upon the Connachta by Gormgal son of Dindatach'.²⁰ The law is of the saint and is established or proclaimed over a particular province; and this is done by a named person or persons. In 783, however, the annal entry has two peculiarities: it is almost entirely in the vernacular, and the promulgation is said to have taken place in Crúachain, the Tara of the Connachta, an ancient pre-Christian site considered to be the capital in some sense of the province of Connaught: 'Fórus Cáno Patricii hi Crúachnaib la Dub dá Leithi 7 la Tipraite filium Taidgg', 'The establishing of the Law of Patrick in Crúachain by Dub dá Leithi and by Tipraite son of Taidg'. True, Tipraite, the king of the Connachta, came from the Uí Briúin of Mag nAí, within which Crúachain lay. An assertion of the status of that site as the capital of the province could do no harm to his dynasty. Yet it is unlikely that he invented a new role for Crúachain, for that is implicit in the Ulster Cycle of tales, some of which predate his reign.

¹⁷ Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-kings*, pp. 64–5, 254–5.

¹⁸ R. Bradley, 'Time Regained: The Creation of Continuity', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 140 (1987), 1–17, includes (pp. 10–14) a discussion of the historical re-use of the Boyne Valley Neolithic monuments.

¹⁹ For 'seats of kingship' see above, pp. 146–7; Knowth, Cnodbae or Cnogbae, Hogan, *Onom.* p. 278, is N 99 73; cf. the *rex Cnoghbai* of AU 789.4, and G. Eogan, 'Report on the Excavations of Some Passage Graves, Unprotected Inhumation Burials and a Settlement Site at Knowth, Co. Meath', *PRLA*, 74, c (1974), 11–112; Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, p. 20. ²⁰ AU 799.9.

The Irish, therefore, were ready to use prehistoric sites as ceremonial capitals.

This may be compared with the Frankish use of Roman cities as capitals.²¹ In the sixth century, Paris, Soissons, Orléans and Reims were the official capitals of the Frankish *regna*. Kings were not regularly resident there; they were more likely to be found at neighbouring royal estates, such as Chelles, Nogent, Berny-Rivière, or at other Roman cities, such as Metz or Chalon-sur-Saône; but nonetheless their capitals were closely associated with their royal authority and they were often buried in cemetery churches outside their walls.²² Clovis is said by Gregory of Tours to have established the seat of his kingship at Paris after his great victory over the Visigoths at Vouillé in 507.²³ Later in the sixth century, after the death in 567 of Charibert I, the eldest of Chlothar I's sons and the ruler of Paris, the other sons could not agree on which of them was to take precedence, and therefore made a solemn treaty that none of them should so much as enter Paris: Paris and its territory became a virtual international area, so great was the significance attached to possession of Clovis's *cathedra regni*.²⁴ Orléans had a separate significance as the recognised place for the national councils of the Frankish kingdom, summoned by the leading Frankish king.²⁵ The early Merovingians, therefore, remained identified, as kings, with particular Roman cities. As their kingship consisted in large part of Roman institutions, so the *Romanitas* of their rule was encapsulated in their capitals.²⁶

By contrast, only the most south-eastern of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, Kent and Essex, seems to have had anything corresponding to Paris. Canterbury was described by Bede as 'the metropolis of Æthelberht's *imperium*';²⁷ and its name, 'the fortress of the Cantware', indicates that it was in some degree a centre for Kent.²⁸ Further north, Roman towns did not function to the same extent as capital cities.

²¹ E. Ewig, 'Résidence et capitale pendant le haut moyen âge', in his *Spätantikes und fränkisches Gallien*, 2 vols., Beiheft der *Francia*, 3 (Munich, 1976–9), i. 383–9.

²² Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* ii.43 (Clovis), iv.20 (Childebert I), iv.21 (Chlothar I); iv.51 (Sigibert I).

²³ *Ibid.*, ii.38 ('Parisius venit ibique cathedram regni constituit'). ²⁴ *Ibid.*, vi.27; vii.6.

²⁵ *Concilia Galliae*, ed. de Clercq, pp. 4–19 (Orléans, 511), 99–103 (Orléans, 533) 114–61 (Orléans, 538, 541 and 549); Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* viii.1–7, gives a narrative of events at and surrounding another Council of Orléans in 585.

²⁶ Cf. Venantius Fortunatus, *Opera Poetica*, ed. F. Leo, MGH AA iv.1 (Berlin, 1881), vi.2, lines 7–10, on Charibert I and Paris; also ii.10, lines 17–24, on Childebert I and Paris. Both passages also emphasise the *Romanitas* of the two kings.

²⁷ 'imperii sui totius erat metropolis', Bede, *HE* i.25 (similarly London was the *metropolis* of the East Saxons: *ibid.*, ii.3); Campbell, 'Bede's Names for Places', in his *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History*, pp. 103, 108. ²⁸ Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury*, pp. 22–5.

Fortresses were important militarily rather than as symbols of continuity with Roman Britain:²⁹ among the Bernicians, Bamburgh was a 'royal fortress', 'urbs regia'.³⁰ There might be occasional links with a pre-Roman past, exemplified by the proximity of the royal *villa* at Yeavering to an Iron Age hillfort; but they were unimportant, as shown by the readiness to move from Yeavering to Millfield.³¹ Such centres as Tamworth among the Mercians never acquired the significance for the Mercian *imperium* that Paris had among the Franks up to the middle of the seventh century, or that Tara had among the Irish. Both for the Franks and for the Irish, royal power was encapsulated in 'seats of kingship' which depended for their significance on a reference to the past;³² and these 'seats of kingship' were primarily settings for the ritual of kingship rather than regular residences. Indeed, since many kings of Tara were based many miles from Brega, let alone Tara itself, the likelihood is that an incoming king of Tara made a solemn entry into the site.³³ The 'Story of the Finding of Cashel' suggests that the king of Munster may have inaugurated his reign in Cashel, his 'seat of kingship', by a form of *tellach*, the ritual by which an heir entered and took possession of his inheritance.³⁴ The claim made in the early Munster text, 'Conall Corc and the Corco Luigde', that Fedlimid mac Tigernaig (*ob.* 590) 'did not enter Cashel' implies that the normal rule was that a king of Cashel did indeed enter his 'seat of kingship'.³⁵ The text was deeply hostile to the claims of Fedlimid's dynasty, Éoganacht Raithlind, and this was its way of dealing with a king who, in its view, should never have ruled Munster, although it was undeniable that he had been king. Guntram, however, as befitted the Roman traditions taken over by the Franks, made an *adventus*, a solemn entry, in good imperial style, when, as senior king of the Merovingians, he visited his capital, Orléans, in which he did not

²⁹ Lincoln was the seat of a royal prefect under Edwin (Bede, *HE* ii.16), and it became the see of the bishop (*ibid.*), but it does not seem to have been the capital of Lindsey, although it plainly had been of the Lindenses, the Linnuis of *Historia Brittonum*, c. 56 (Lindenses = the people of Lindum, Lincoln).

³⁰ Bede, *HE* iii.6; cf. Stephen, *Vita S. Wilfridi*, c. 60; for the various nuances of *urbs* in early Anglo-Saxon texts, see Campbell, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History*, pp. 98–108. ³¹ Bede, *HE* ii.14.

³² For the legends which, in the Old Irish period, expressed this reference to the past, see Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, chap. 4. Ó Cathasaigh, *The Heroic Biography of Cormac mac Airt*.

³³ It is possible that a large but temporary edifice may have been constructed for the occasion, of the kind attested in the twelfth century: M. T. Flanagan, *Irish Society, Anglo-Norman Settlers, Angevin Kingship: Interactions in Ireland in the Late Twelfth Century* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 202–3.

³⁴ Ed. M. Dillon, *Ériu*, 16 (1952), 66, tr. 71.

³⁵ 'Conall Corc and the Corco Luigde', ed. K. Meyer, in O. J. Bergin *et al.*, *Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts*, 3 (Halle, 1910), p. 62, lines 27–8.

reside.³⁶ Among the English, however, such references to a Roman past were more important for the Church than for royal power; York became the ecclesiastical centre of Northumbria, not the royal capital.³⁷

(II) TARA AND TAILTIU

In the poem on the Airgíalla, dated to *c.* 700, there is a statement of the rights of those peoples as against the 'king of the Uí Néill' or 'the king of Leth Cuinn'.³⁸ This king of the Uí Néill or king of Leth Cuinn is also styled 'the lord of Tailtiu'.³⁹ Leth Cuinn was a term for the northern half of Ireland, dominated by the descendants of Conn Cétchathach; so, when in 859 Máel Sechnaill secured the allegiance of Osraige (Ossory, previously part of Munster), the latter kingdom was said to have been formally alienated to Leth Cuinn, the agreement being guaranteed by sureties given by Máel Gúala, king of Munster.⁴⁰ The king to whom the Airgíalla gave allegiance was thus described in three quite different ways within the poem: as the king of a particular place, Tailtiu; as the king of a group of related lineages, the Uí Néill; and as the king of a territory, the northern half of Ireland. The poem thereby raises a number of problems. Was the king of Tara simply the king of the Uí Néill? What was the relationship between the king of Tara and those other supposed descendants of Conn Cétchathach, the Connachta and the Airgíalla? And, finally, what is the significance of the poem's preference for calling the king of the Uí Néill the lord of Tailtiu rather than the king of Tara?

Tailtiu was the recognised site for the annual assembly and fair of the Uí Néill and their client-kingdoms.⁴¹ It also contained a church and was used for ecclesiastical synods.⁴² Before the Viking era, it appears in the annals when some king decided to make a disturbance at the assembly. The poem on the Airgíalla cites a disturbance at an *óenach* (fair-cum-assembly) as one of the offences which the king of the Uí Néill can judge on his own authority. In the annals, such disturbances appear to

³⁶ Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* viii.1. The date was 585; since Chilperic's death in 584 Guntram was the sole surviving king of his generation. Guntram appears to have summoned a Church council of the entire kingdom of the Franks on the occasion: *ibid.*, viii.2–7.

³⁷ Cf. Alcuin's poem on the Church of York, ed. P. Godman, *The Bishops, Kings, and Saints of York*, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford, 1982), which begins with the Roman foundation of the city, lines 19–29.

³⁸ 'A Poem on the Airgíalla', ed. O Daly, pp. 181–4, tr. pp. 186–8, stanzas 21, 31, 33–4, 45.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, stanzas 1 (omitting *Ténrae scéa*, with Mrs O Daly, for metrical reasons); cf. stanza 49.

⁴⁰ AU 859.3.

⁴¹ Teltown, N 80 74; Binchy, 'The Fair of Tailtiu and the Feast of Tara'; Mac Neill, *The Festival of Lughnasa*, pp. 311–38. ⁴² AU 723.5; Adomnán, *VSC* iii.3.

be deliberate affronts to royal dignity, usually by those who themselves have aspirations to be king of Tara. So, in 717, Fogartach mac Néill, of the branch of Síl nÁeda Sláne that made its home in southern Brega, caused 'a disturbance of the fair of Tailtiu' in which two men were killed. The king of Tara at the time was Fergal mac Máele Dúin of Cenél nÉogain; Fogartach himself would briefly succeed Fergal after the latter's defeat and death at the battle of Almuine in 722, before himself being killed in 724.⁴³ In the Viking period, however, the references to Tailtiu in the annals take a different character: 'The *óenach* of Tailtiu was not held, although there was no just or worthy reason, something of which we have not heard from ancient times.'⁴⁴ This entry, with its unusual display of concern, demonstrates that the *óenach* was annual and that it had the support of the annalist's own church, itself probably close by in Brega.

In 732 a more complex situation is revealed by an entry in the Annals of Ulster: 'The rout of Cathal by Domnall in Tailtiu and the rout of Fallomon by Cathal in Tlachtga.'⁴⁵ The interpretation of this brief sentence plainly depends upon the identification of the persons and places mentioned. Domnall is almost certainly Domnall mac Murchada of Cland Cholmáin, king of Tara from 743 to 763. No other Domnall was of sufficient prominence in the midlands to be identified by his first name alone, without the addition of a patronymic. For similar reasons, Fallomon is likely to be Fallomon son of Cú Chongalt, a descendant of Colmán Becc, described at his death in 766 as king of Mide, and the king who gave his name to the kingdom of Coille Fallomuin.⁴⁶ The poem on the Airgialla includes his branch of the Uí Néill, the descendants of Colmán Becc, alongside Cland Cholmáin (Móir), among 'the five kindreds' of the Uí Néill who supplied 'lords of Tailtiu'. Tailtiu, however, is rivalled in this entry by Tlachtga, identified with the Hill of Ward near Athboy in Co. Westmeath,⁴⁷ and thus lying within Mide rather than Brega. To judge by the parallel between Tailtiu and Tlachtga in this entry, Tlachtga may have been, like Tailtiu, an assembly site, though of lesser status, with appropriate legends attached.⁴⁸ The third king involved is Cathal; unfortunately this is a common name and there was

⁴³ I am assuming that the kingship from which Fogartach was expelled in 714 only to return in 716 was the kingship of the southern Uí Néill or simply of Brega. Fergal's intervention in response to an internal Síl nÁeda Sláne feud in 718 shows him as very much in control at that date.

⁴⁴ AU 873.6; cf. 876.3; 878.7. ⁴⁵ It is not in the AT or ACIn (CS is here defective).

⁴⁶ CGH i.162 (144 c 47). The name of Coille Follamain is preserved in that of the parish of Killallon in Co. Meath: Walsh, *The Placenames of Westmeath*, p. 38 n. 2.

⁴⁷ N 73 64; Hogan, *Onom.*, p. 639. ⁴⁸ *Metrical Dindshenchas*, ed. Gwynn, iv.168.

more than one Cathal who might have been involved. The candidates are as follows: (1) Cathal mac Áeda of the Uí Chernaig branch of SílnÁeda Sláne, who died in 737; (2) Cathal mac Muiredaig, king of the Connachta, who died in 735; and (3) Cathal mac Finnguini, king of Munster, who died in 742. The consensus among historians has been in favour of the last-named king, and thus of a remarkable intervention within Brega and Mide by a king belonging to the Éoganacht Glendamnach (Glanworth, Co. Cork).⁴⁹

The implications of this consensus view are that Cathal mac Finnguini had come from Munster – presumably at the head of an army – and had occupied one of the principal royal sites of the Uí Néill. There he had been defeated by Domnall mac Murchada of Cland Cholmáin; but he had also defeated Fallomon mac Con Congalt at another royal site, Tlachtga. In other words, Cathal was directly challenging the Uí Néill supremacy in the midlands, in both Brega and Mide. We do not have to suppose that the challenge was made at the time of the Fair; the choice of royal sites was enough to make the point.⁵⁰

The balance of probabilities, however, is not in favour of the consensus view. The Annals of Inisfallen, which were anxious to extract anything from the Chronicle of Ireland favourable to Munster, showed no interest in this entry.⁵¹ Moreover, this is in spite of their willingness to give Cathal mac Finnguini the title of king of Ireland in his obit.⁵² Cathal mac Muiredaig, the king of the Connachta, is not a likely alternative, since there is no evidence to show that he had hostile intentions towards the Uí Néill. As we shall see, the Connachta and the southern Uí Néill appear to have had a formal treaty relationship throughout all, or at least most, of the eighth century. If Cathal mac Muiredaig were

⁴⁹ Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, p. 208, following E. Mac Neill, *Phases of Irish History* (Dublin, 1919), p. 237, and Binchy, 'The Fair of Tailtiu and the Feast of Tara', 121. Idem, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship*, pp. 42–3, uses the evidence of the Middle-Irish poem *Teist Chathail meic Finguine*, LL iii.627–8, for the power of Cathal mac Finguine; its value can be gauged from its claim that Cathal became king of the Ulstermen. It may have been composed to provide a precedent for the activities of Brian Bórama or Muirchertach Ua Briain.

⁵⁰ Binchy, 'The Fair of Tailtiu and the Feast of Tara', 121–2, is no doubt right to point out that the annal provides no evidence that Cathal's defeat by Domnall occurred at the time of the Fair; but he goes too far when he claims 'that the two incidents, which the chronicler has bracketed together, represent simply the veering fortunes of battle during one of Cathal's campaigns in the Midlands'.

⁵¹ Contrast AI's entry for 721 based on a much briefer entry in the Chronicle of Ireland, AU 721.6. In AI the role of the Leinster king, Murchad mac Brain, is ignored and the riposte by the king of Tara, Fergal mac Máele Dúin (AU 721.8) is passed over; the rest of AI's annal, with its comparison between Cathal and Brian Bórama shows that it was written at a much later period.

⁵² AI 742.

the person who disturbed the authority of the Uí Néill in their special royal sites, it would be entirely out of character.

Cathal mac Áeda of Síl nÁeda Sláne is, however, quite a different proposition. Síl nÁeda Sláne and Cland Cholmáin were ancient rivals.⁵³ At this date, the Cenél nEógain king, Áed Allán, was putting strong pressure on the current king of Tara, Flaithbertach mac Loingsig.⁵⁴ As a result, the southern Uí Néill were probably left to their own devices, able to carry on their ancient feuds without external control. Much the simplest and most economical explanation of the entry is, therefore, that Cathal mac Áeda was attempting to prevent the Mide branches of Uí Néill, Cland Cholmáin Móir and Cland Cholmáin Bicc from gaining a predominance in the midlands. Five years beforehand, in 728, Cináed mac Írgalaig, the last Síl nÁeda Sláne king of Tara for some two centuries, had been killed by Flaithbertach mac Loingsig.⁵⁵ His death, coupled with the feuds within Síl nÁeda Sláne itself, gave Domnall mac Murchada his chance. The latter's success in humiliating Cathal at Tailtiu was a foretaste of what was to come: the long-enduring hegemony of Cland Cholmáin among the southern Uí Néill.

The annal appears, therefore, to have two lessons for us. First, one way in which an increasingly powerful king could proclaim his ambition to be king of Tara was to take possession, if only temporarily, of Tailtiu. The victory in itself may not have counted for much, but its location at Tailtiu was crucial. Secondly, one possible way in which Domnall may have strengthened his position is suggested by the notice of Cathal's defeat of Fallomon mac Con Congalt at Tlachtga. Domnall's father, Murchad mac Diarmata, was called Murchad of Mide;⁵⁶ moreover, at his death, he was called king of the Uí Néill.⁵⁷ The epithet 'of Mide' was also borne by his uncle Bodbchad and by his grandfather Diarmait mac Airmedaig.⁵⁸ On the other hand, when Fallomon mac Con Congalt died in 766, he was given the title 'king of Mide'. The notice of his defeat at Tlachtga suggests that he might already have had such a position in 733. Yet it is most unlikely that Fallomon was the most powerful king within Mide; that position was held by Domnall mac Murchada. Similarly,

⁵³ For a recent example, see AU 714.1.

⁵⁴ Fighting in Mag nÍtha in 732, 733, 734, after which Áed Allán appears to have taken the kingship of Tara, to judge by AU 735.2, and probably also Mag nÍtha. In the genealogies, this kingdom was ruled by a cadet branch of Cenél nEógain descended from Áed Allán's brother, Conchobair, CGH i.179 (146 c 21). ⁵⁵ AU 728.1. ⁵⁶ Cf. AU 749.6 (the obit of his son Coirpre).

⁵⁷ AU 715.2. ⁵⁸ AU 689 and 704.

when Domnall's father, Murchad mac Diarmata, was called king of the Uí Néill, the most powerful king among the Uí Néill was the king of Tara, Fergal mac Maíle Dúin of Cenél nÉogain. In these cases, there seems to be an inconsistency either between titles or between title and power.

The apparent contrast between power and title can be set out as follows:

Most powerful king among the Uí Néill in 715: Fergal mac Maíle Dúin

King of the Uí Néill in 715: Murchad Midi

Most powerful king in Mide in 733: Domnall mac Murchada

King of Mide (766 and possibly 733): Fallomon mac Con Congalt.

The division seems to be between titles normally borne by the same person – king of Tara and king of the Uí Néill – so as to separate title from power, 'king of Meath' from the most powerful king within Meath.

The pattern is clarified by a later entry of the same kind. In 863 Lorcán mac Cathail, king of Mide, cooperated with three Scandinavian kings in plundering the lands of Flann mac Conaing, king of north Brega, and in searching the Boyne Valley tombs.⁵⁹ For this treachery, Lorcán, still entitled king of Mide, was blinded the very next year by Áed Findlíath, king of Tara. Lorcán's son is said in a later annal entry to have been one of the leaders of the Luigni.⁶⁰ Lorcán mac Cathail, then, did not even belong to the Uí Néill. He appears to have been a deputy king of Mide for Máel Sechnaill I, who had died just before, in 862. Similarly, Murchad is likely to have been a deputy king of the Uí Néill, or, more probably, as we shall see, of the Southern Uí Néill, on behalf of Fergal mac Maíle Dúin. In 733, Murchad's son Domnall may be seen employing the same political tactic by allowing Fallomon mac Con Congalt of Cland Cholmáin Bicc to be king of Mide and to enjoy formal possession of the royal site at Tlachtga. As these examples show, supremacy among the Uí Néill, as later among Dál Cais, was built up by, among other things, flattering possible rivals by allowing them to enjoy titles and perquisites.⁶¹ All dynasties were governed by the dominant ambition to stay at the top by demonstrating *febas*, political standing. The distribution of titles and of subordinate power in the role of a deputy king was one way to give political allies *febas*, and thus allow them hope for the continued pre-eminence of their dynasties. The tactic may have been an old one. Fallomon's great-great-great-grandfather, Óengus mac Colmáin, was entitled king of the Uí Néill in his obit in 621, at a time when Suibne

⁵⁹ AU 863.4.

⁶⁰ AU 901.1.

⁶¹ *EIWK*, pp. 102–4.

Menn of Cenél nÉogain was, according to most regnal lists, king of Tara.⁶²

(III) TARA AND THE KINGSHIP OF IRELAND

Royal sites were, therefore, entwined in the politics of the Uí Néill. They were similarly significant in other provinces: in 715 Murchad mac Brain, who had just succeeded Cellach Cúalann as king of Leinster, made an inaugural expedition. Its destination was the Munster capital, Cashel, already known in the ninth century as 'Cashel of the kings'.⁶³ One explanation of the role of royal sites is that such places were much the most important royal insignia. Early Irish kings were not crowned and, in spite of some interest in royal unction in the *Hibernensis*, they seem not to have been anointed either. The royal site was thus the throne of the early Irish king, the pre-eminent sign of regality. When that legendary exemplar of the Tara kingship, Cormac mac Airt, succeeded Mac Con, of the Corcu Loígde of Munster, he revealed his descent and his claim to Tara by giving a juster judgement than the one just given by Mac Con. Mac Con's reaction, when he heard from his steward about the superior judgement, was as follows:

'Be off with you!' said he [to the steward]. 'He shall succeed me. If there is a man of Art's progeny in Ireland, that man is he. Let him come [here] under my protection, and I shall leave Tara to him, for it is no longer mine since I gave the judgement.'⁶⁴

Mac Con does not say, 'I shall leave the throne (or crown) to him', but 'I shall leave Tara to him'.

Although Mac Con was from Munster rather than from 'Art's progeny', namely Dál Cuind, and was not even of the Éoganachta but of the south-west Munster dynasty of Corcu Loígde, he was not thereby an unjust interloper as king of Tara. Cormac mac Airt himself remarked of Mac Con: 'The man who passed that judgement never passed unjust judgement before.' Yet it is sometimes suggested that Tara was only a legendary site associated with the kingship of the Uí Néill. According to the leading student of early Irish history of his generation, D. A. Binchy, the Uí Néill kingdoms formed what was in effect a province, like Munster

⁶² AU 621.2; *LL* i.95 (line 3055); Suibne Menn had killed his predecessor in the regnal list of Tara, Máel Coba, in 615 (AU). See below, pp. 492–3, for the possibility that Óengus had a claim to be king of Tara. ⁶³ AU 715.4; cf. 836.2.

⁶⁴ Ó Cathasaigh, *The Heroic Biography of Cormac mac Airt*, pp. 126–7; cf. p. 63. The text, *Scéla Éogain 7 Cormaic*, is probably of the eighth century.

or Connaught; the king of Tara was the ruler of this political grouping. Moreover, while Uí Néill propagandists might claim that the king of Tara was the king of Ireland, he was, in reality, only the most powerful king in Ireland.⁶⁵ Similarly, the poem on the Airgialla talks of the king of the Uí Néill as the lord of Tailtiu, suggesting that the two principal royal sites of Brega, Tailtiu and Tara, were inextricably attached to the Uí Néill. Yet, if they were so attached to the Uí Néill, how could Cormac mac Airt acknowledge the justice of Mac Con's rule in Tara, when the latter had no link with the Uí Néill? In order to examine this aspect of the kingship of Tara more closely, I shall first consider the lists which purport to give the succession to Tara, together with those kings not included in the usual lists, who were nevertheless claimed to have ruled in Tara. The crucial issue here is how far the kingship of Tara was, as Binchy claimed, essentially an overlordship presiding over the Uí Néill kingdoms or, on the contrary, was a prize for which kings who were not of the Uí Néill might compete. As we shall see, there is a link between one family of regnal lists of Tara and the *Life of Columba* by Adomnán. The evidence provided by Adomnán, however, demonstrates that the issue is more complex than is suggested by the standard debate. The latter is between those historians for whom the kingship of Tara was, in some sense, a national monarchy, and those for whom, as we have seen, it was merely one among several provincial kingships, more powerful perhaps than the rest, and certainly with grander ambitions, but in reality only the overkingship of one part of Ireland.

The strongest argument for thinking that the kingship of Tara was more than simply an overkingship of the Uí Néill is that other dynasties claimed to have held the kingship at various points from the fifth to the middle of the seventh century. If members of dynasties other than the Uí Néill could claim the kingship of Tara without manifest absurdity, that kingship must have represented the summit of regality for all such claimants and their peoples. The claims of the Leinstermen and also of the Uí Fiachrach of Connaught in the period up to c. 500 have been discussed in the previous chapter. In the late sixth century non-Uí Néill claimants came from the Ulstermen and their neighbours in the same province, the Cruithni. The first of these rulers said to have been king of Ireland is Báetán mac Cairill of the Ulstermen.⁶⁶ A genealogical note of the early eleventh century claimed that

⁶⁵ Binchy, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship*, pp. 36–8.

⁶⁶ CGH i.408 (LL 330 c 25); cf. CGH i.274–5 (the poem is probably early Middle Irish; note *giallastar* and Alba = Scotland).

It should be known that no king has taken [the kingship of] Ireland after the death of Patrick apart from the lineage of Níall except for two, that is Báetán and Brian. But some do not reckon Báetán among the great kings.⁶⁷

Brían is Brían Bórama who died at the battle of Clontarf in 1014; other sources of the same period show that Báetán is Báetán mac Cairill.⁶⁸ Yet Báetán in his obit in the annals is only entitled king of the Ulstermen.⁶⁹ Some of these statements come from genealogical tracts on Ulster dynasties and may to some extent, therefore, be discounted. Yet the one just quoted, pairing Báetán and Brían, is from a text favourable to the Uí Néill; indeed, it is particularly significant as a statement of their claims, given the charged political situation created by the career of Brían Bórama. True, it comes from long after Báetán's time, but it is unlikely that the Uí Néill, who had indeed monopolised the kingship of Tara between the middle of the seventh century and the late tenth, would have allowed such information to find any place in their genealogical tradition had there been no truth in it.

How much truth there is in the claims made on behalf of Báetán is very difficult to tell, but we can make a little progress by considering the annals and king-lists. The latter fall into three distinct groups. First, there are the lists preserved in the great genealogical collections from the early twelfth century onwards, which for convenience will be called 'the Middle Irish king-list';⁷⁰ quite different is a document called 'The Vision of Conn', preserved only in sixteenth-century manuscripts but almost certainly of late seventh-century date.⁷¹ In between are regnal lists that agree with neither group, one inserted into the Annals of Inisfallen and another written by an eleventh-century Irish scholar on the continent, Marianus Scottus.⁷² These lists can be compared with the annals and with Adomnán's Life of Columba (see table 12.1). The differences

⁶⁷ CGH i.124.

⁶⁸ In the genealogies of Dál Fiatach, CGH i.408 (LL 330 c 25), Báetán mac Cairill is called *ní hÉrenn*, 'king of Ireland'. ⁶⁹ AU 581 (AT, CS).

⁷⁰ Bodleian Library, Rawlinson MS B 502 (CGH i.124–5), the Book of Leinster (LL i.95–6), 'The Laud Synchronisms', ed. K. Meyer, *ŽCP*, 9 (1913), 478–9, picking up again after lists of the kings of Dál nAraidi and Cland Cholmáin, at p. 480, line 28.

⁷¹ *Baile Chuinn*, ed. and tr. Murphy, 146–9.

⁷² *The Annals of Inisfallen*, ed. Mac Airt, pp. 42–4 (written by the main late eleventh-century hand); B. Mac Carthy, *The Codex Palatino-Vaticanus*, No. 830 (Dublin, 1892), pp. 93–6. Another regnal list, of less value because it differs little from the Middle Irish king-lists except in confusion and wrong ordering, is *Baile in Scáil*, ed. R. Thurneysen, 'Baile in Scáil', *ŽCP*, 20 (1936), 213–27 (from Rawl. B. 512, 101^r–105^v); from § 41 onwards, K. Meyer, 'Das Ende von Baile in Scáil aus Rawl. B 512, fol. 103b2', *ŽCP*, 12 (1918), 232–8. In their sequence, the eleventh-century regnal lists in verse composed by Fland Mainistrech and Gilla Cóemáin, LL iii.491 and 510, correspond closely to those in Rawlinson B 502 and other MSS.

Table 12.1. *The Tara king-lists to 695*

In italics: kings only in one of two lists, either the Middle Irish king-list or *Baile Chuinn*. Underlined: kings in *Baile Chuinn* in a different order in other lists.

Rawlinson, Laud and Book of Leinster	Baile Chuinn	Candidates from other sources (those from the Annals of Inisfallen and Marianus Scottus marked AI and M)
1. Lóegaire mac Néill	11. Lóegaire	
2. Ailill Molt	12. <i>Cóirpre</i>	
3. Lugaid mac Lóegairi	13. Ailill (Molt)	
4. Muirchertach mac Ercae	14. Lugaid (son of Lóegaire)	
5. Túathal Máelgarb	15. Mac Ercéne (Muirchertach Mac Ercae)	
6. Diarmait mac Cerball	16. Óengarb (Tuathal Máelgarb?)	
7. <i>Domnall and Fergus</i>		
8. <i>Báetán and Eochaid</i>		
9. <i>Ainnere mac Sénnai</i>		
10. <i>Báetán (mac Niméda)</i>		
11. <i>Áed mac Amnerch</i>	16a. Áed	Rawl. 8 and 9 in reverse order in AI and M
12. <i>Colmán Ráimid</i> and Áed Sláne	17. <u>Áed Olláin</u>	Báetán mac Cairill (Ulaíd)
13. Áed Uaridnach	18. <u>Diarmait (mac Cerball)</u>	Colmán Becc ruling with
14. <i>Máel Coba</i>	19. <i>Fiachna (Fiachna mac Báetán?)</i>	Áed mac Ainnirech (M)
15. Suibne Menn mac Fiachna		Fiachna mac Báetán (Cruithni)
16. Domnall mac Áeda	20. Suibne	Suibne mac Colmán Móir (M)
17. <i>Conall and Cellach, maic Máile Coba</i> .	20a. Óengus	Óengus mac Colmán (M)
18. Blathmac and Diarmait, two sons of Áed Sláne.	21. Domnall mac Áeda	Congal Cáech mac Scandláin (Cruithni)
19. <i>Sechnassach mac Blathmeic</i>	22. Blathmac and Diarmait (sons of Áed Sláne)	
20. <i>Cenn-Fíaelad mac Blathmaic</i>		
21. Finnachta Fledach mac Dúinchada	23. Finnsnechta	

between the Middle Irish king-list and *Baile Chuinn* probably have a variety of explanations. The inclusion of Coirpre after Lóegaire mac Néill is easily explained by the evidence for Coirpre mac Néill's role in the conquest of the midlands; it accords entirely with the annal suggesting that Coirpre gained control of Tailtiu.⁷³ The omissions are less convincing. First, they have a clear distribution: in *Baile Chuinn* no Cenél Conaill ruler was included among the seventh-century kings of Tara, apart from Domnall mac Áeda. Some of them were admittedly controversial cases to judge by an entry in the Annals of Ulster for 643: 'Here there is doubt as to who reigned after Domnall. Some historiographers say that four kings, namely Cellach and Conall Cóel and the two sons of Áed Sláne, namely Diarmait and Blathmac, ruled in shared reigns.'⁷⁴ In the Middle Irish king-list, and also in Marianus Scottus' list and that in the Annals of Inisfallen, Cellach and Conall Cóel reigned first, followed by Diarmait and Blathmac; in *Baile Chuinn*, only Diarmait and Blathmac, sons of Áed Sláne, were listed. Some of the Cenél Conaill candidates for recognition as king of Tara may, as this example indicates, have had weak claims (see table 12.1).

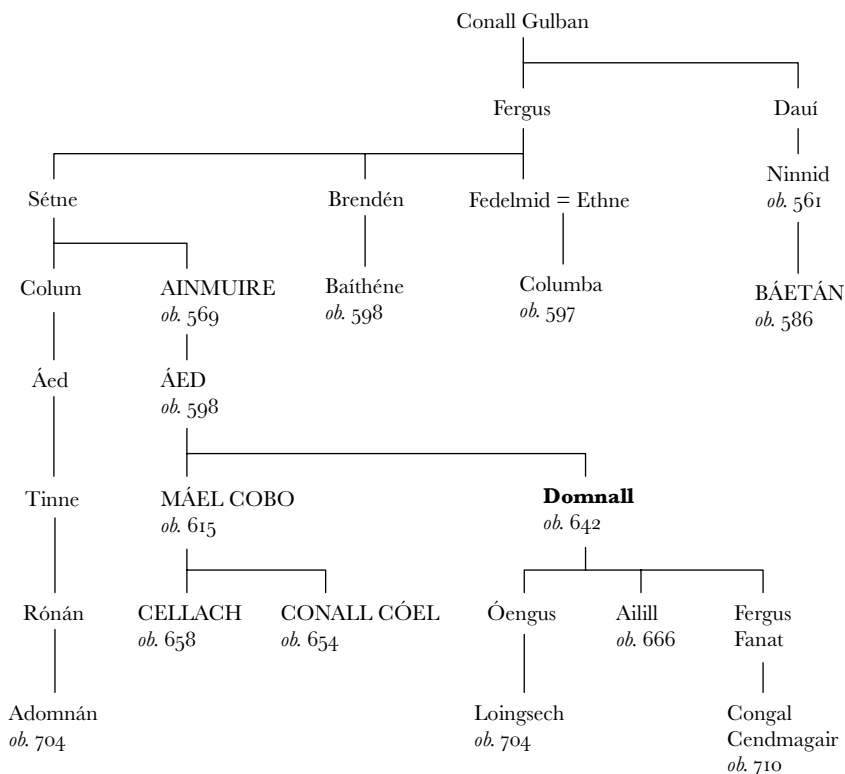
The others omitted by *Baile Chuinn*, apart from Cellach and Conall Cóel, can best be assessed by taking them as a group (see table 12.2). Nos. 8 and 9 in the list in Rawlinson, Laud and the Book of Leinster are evidently in the wrong order; and this error goes back to the first half of the eleventh century, since they were also in the wrong order in a poem by Flann Mainistrech (ob. 1056), *Ríg Themra tóebaige iar tain*.⁷⁵ All these lists, therefore, are likely to derive from a common exemplar in which this mistake had been made. The annalist presumably reckoned the three years of Báetán and Eochaid as 570, 571 and 572, implying that they succeeded Ainmuire mac Sétnai, who died in 569. What we have, therefore, is an annalistic tradition about these early kings of Tara and a separate tradition transmitted in the regnal lists. Although the Book of Leinster regnal list incorporated information from a Clonmacnois version of the Chronicle of Ireland, the list itself continued to have the erroneous sequence; in other words, it was not constructed out of the annals but was based on an existing regnal list into which annalistic information was inserted.

Among the other lists, that given by Marianus Scottus is the easiest to place. It is introduced by the heading, 'The rulers of Ireland who from one of its halves, that is from Leth Cuinn, ruled from Conn Cétchathach up to

⁷³ See the previous chapter, pp. 447–9.

⁷⁴ AU 643.7.

⁷⁵ LL iii.510.



Cenél Conaill Kings of Tara in the Middle-Irish list but omitted by *Baile Chuinn* are in capitals; those included in both sources are in bold.

Fig. 12.1. Cenél Conaill and *Baile Chuinn*

Fland mac Máil Sechnaill'. This highlights the end-point of the list, namely Flann Sinna, son of Máel Sechnaill, who died in 916. For Flann Sinna it gives no reign-length. Its additional names, as compared with the Middle Irish king-list, show that it was favourable to the claims of Cland Cholmáin, rulers of Mide.⁷⁶ It is a fair supposition, therefore, that Marianus' source was a regnal list drawn up in Mide during the reign of Flann Sinna as king of Tara (879–916). The list in the Annals of Inisfallen is closer to the Middle Irish king-list, from which it differs in having Ainmire mac Sétnai in his correct position and by inserting Fogartach (mac Néill) of Síl nÁeda Sláne between two Cenél Conaill kings, Loingsech mac Óengussa and Congal mac Fergussa. Fogartach is also included by Marianus and by *Baile in Scáil*;

⁷⁶ It includes Colmán Becc as co-ruler with Áed mac Ainmirech, Suibne mac Colmáin Móir and Óengus mac Colmáin, all of the Mide dynasties of Cland Cholmáin and Caille Follomuín.

Table 12.2. *Kings of Tara omitted by Baile Chuinn*

<i>Rawlinson</i>	<i>Dynasty</i>	<i>Annals</i>	<i>Adomnán, VSC</i>
7. Domnall and Fergus	Cenél nÉogain	Succeed 565; <i>ob.</i> 566	Cf. i.7
8. Báetán and Eochaid	Cenél nÉogain	<i>Ob.</i> 572 in third year of reign	Cf. i.12
9. Ainmire m. Sétnai	Cenél Conaill	Succeeds 566; <i>ob.</i> 569	
10. Báetán (m. Ninneda?)	Cenél Conaill	<i>Ob.</i> 586, king of Tara	
11. Áed m. Ainmirech	Cenél Conaill	<i>Ob.</i> 598	Cf. i.11
14. Máel Coba m. Áeda	Cenél Conaill	<i>Ob.</i> 615	

and his insertion has possible support in the annals.⁷⁷ Leaving aside the problem of the years assigned to each king's reign (frequently eccentric to judge by the annals), the list in the Annals of Inisfallen is likely to be closely related to the version of the Middle Irish king-list as it existed before the reign of Ainmire mac Sétnai was misplaced.

Another probable error in the Middle Irish king-list lies in the relationship between the reigns of Báetán mac Ninneda and Áed mac Ainmirech, both of Cenél Conaill. Áed is given a reign of twenty-eight years by the Book of Leinster king-list, twenty-three years in Rawlinson.⁷⁸ The longer reign-length would imply that Áed mac Ainmirech's first regnal year was 571, the year before Báetán and Eochaid died in the third year of their reign. The shorter one would make 576 the first year, and this may be related to the date given by the Annals of Ulster to the royal assembly at Druimm Cete at which Áed was present namely 575.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ *Baile in Scáil*, ed. Thurneysen, 213–27, § 40; AU (AI) 714. 4: Fogartach ua Cernaig was expelled from the kingship.

⁷⁸ Many of the reign-lengths are a later addition in Rawlinson B 502. Compare the twenty-nine years given by the list in the Annals of Inisfallen and the thirteen years (together with Colmán Becc) given by Marianus Scottus.

⁷⁹ On the assumption that the author of the king-list reckoned 576 as Áed's first regnal year because he believed him to have become king during 575. The 'magna conuentio Dromma Ceta' is the only event recorded in AU under 575; the Clonmacnois annals, apart from ACLon, do not have this entry and seem to have skipped this annal altogether; ACLon's entry, s.a. 587, may come from a marginal note itself derived, in part at least, from a regnal list. On the other hand, Adomnán's interest in the event (VSC i.49, 50) suggests that it was in the original Iona Annals. For a discussion of the 'conference of the kings', see J. Bannerman, 'The Convention of Druim Cett', in his *Studies in the History of Dalriada*, pp. 157–70; F.J. Byrne, 'The Ireland of Columba', *Historical Studies*, 5 (1965), 45–6, and Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, p. 29; since it appears to be assumed that Áed mac Ainmirech was already king of Tara, Sharpe, *Adomnán: Life of Columba*, n. 204, rightly prefers a date of c. 590, in other words close to the date preferred by ACLon.

(IV) DRUIMM CETE, THE UÍ NÉILL AND OSRAIGE

A chapter of Adomnán's Life of St Columba, one of four which mention Druimm Cete, raises wider issues. Two of these chapters certainly, and probably all four, refer to the 'conference of the kings' at Druimm Cete between Áed mac Ainmirech and Áedán mac Gabráin, king of Dál Riata.⁸⁰ According to Adomnán, Scandlán mac Colmáin was detained in the household of Áed mac Ainmirech at the time of the meeting. The prophecy attributed to Columba in the chapter shows that Scandlán became king 'among [his] *gens*' after the death of Áed mac Ainmirech and reigned for a little over thirty years. These details make it extremely likely that Scandlán was the king of Osraige who died in 643.⁸¹ His father died in 605, and the king of Osraige who may have been his grandfather died in 583.⁸² At the date given to the meeting at Druimm Cete in the Annals of Ulster, 575, Scandlán's grandfather could therefore have been king, while at the much more probable date of *c.* 590 his father may have been king. Adomnán describes Scandlán as being detained in chains, which is best explained on the assumption that Scandlán was a forfeited hostage, *gíall díthma*.⁸³ From what the laws say, this should imply that Scandlán's father or grandfather had been an acknowledged client of Áed mac Ainmirech, and in that role had given his grandson as a hostage.⁸⁴ Subsequently, however, he had either failed or refused to discharge his obligations as a client. Adomnán, then, appears to have pictured Scandlán as the victim of such a failure or refusal on the part of the king of Osraige.

⁸⁰ Adomnán, *VSC* i.11. The others are i.10, 49, 50. Only in the latter two is it explicit that the occasion was the *magna conuentio*, but Áed mac Ainmirech was present in i.11, and the fosterers of Domnall mac Áeda, present on the same occasion according to i.10, are likely to have been of royal status. Druimm Cete appears to have been inland from the northern coast of Ireland west of the Bann: in i.49 Columba and Comgall of Bangor returned from Druimm Cete to the seaward plains and stopped at Dún Ceithirinn (for which cf. AU 681.1), before Columba proceeded to Coleraine in i.50. Comgall's participation suggests that the kings of the Cruithni may also have been present.

⁸¹ The Osraige would have been a *gens* in Adomnán's terminology: see above, pp. 96–100.

⁸² The Colmán who died in 605 was, according to the annals, the son of Feradach, but the latter was his uncle according to the genealogies, *CGH* i.15–16; cf. also *ibid.*, i.111. According to a marginal addition in *LL*'s version of the pedigree given in *CGH* i.15–16, Scandlán was the son of Cenn Fáelad (m. Indfáelad = maic Cind Fáelad with -c- for -cc-), who was himself the son of Colmán. This, however, appears to derive from a misplacing of the note as it appears in the Rawlinson text (m. Colmain *cuius filius* Scandlain). The Dauí of the patronymic in AU 583 is the Rumand Dauí of the pedigree. This latter combination of two names suggests contamination between two pedigrees or between a pedigree and a regnal list. If the tradition assumed a direct succession of father to son (Dauí replaced by Colmán, who was succeeded by Scandlán), the pedigree is very likely to have been contaminated by a regnal list.

⁸³ *Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchey, lines 596–7.

⁸⁴ Stacey, *The Road to Judgment*, p. 107.

The implications of this story are far-reaching. It is usually said that Munster was entirely independent of the Uí Néill until the invasions of Máel Sechnaill I in the middle of the ninth century.⁸⁵ Yet in the pre-Viking period Osraige was indubitably part of Munster; indeed, much later, in 859, Máel Sechnaill compelled the king of Munster to alienate it to the northern half of Ireland, Leth Cuinn, by means of a formal contract.⁸⁶ The elaborate legality of those proceedings presupposed that Osraige's attachment to Munster was far from being a transient phenomenon.

There are, moreover, indications in the genealogies and in the saints' lives that, at the time of Scandlán mac Colmáin, there was a close link between Osraige in east Munster and Corcu Loígde in the south-west.⁸⁷ These indications were powerfully reinforced in 1969 by the discovery of an early sixth-century ogam inscription in the townland of Cloghabrody by the River Nore in Co. Kilkenny.⁸⁸ It reads

VEDDELLEMETTO MU/CI/LOGIDDEAS/AVVI MUNICCONA

This probably corresponds to Old Irish (genitive) 'Fedelmtheo moccu Loígde, aui Muinchon', 'of Fedelm of the [*gens*] Corcu Loígde, grandson [or 'descendant'] of Muinchú'. This stone, situated in Osraige territory, thus commemorated a man belonging to the Corcu Loígde. If, then, the alliance between Osraige and the Corcu Loígde endured until the early sixth century, there was only a short interval until an Uí Néill king was exercising, with mixed success, an overlordship over Osraige in the late sixth century. A natural inference is that the Éoganachta established their dominance of Munster in the sixth century and did so with Uí Néill help. This was all at a time when the Uí Néill were the normal but not the invariable kings of Tara.

A further inference is that some of the principal origin-legends of the Uí Néill and Éoganachta were, in their general thrust, historically true.⁸⁹ They recounted a story of a struggle: on one side were two allies, Art mac Cuinn (Conn being the ancestor of all the Connachta and the Uí Néill) and Éogan mac Ailella (ancestor of the Éoganachta); on the other

⁸⁵ Binchy, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship*, pp. 32–3, 38; idem, 'The Date and Provenance of *Uraicecht Becc*', pp. 50–1; Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, p. 202 (qualified).

⁸⁶ AU 859.3. It subsequently drifted towards Leinster.

⁸⁷ L. Ó Buachalla, 'Contributions Towards the Political History of Munster, 450–800 A.D.', *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, 2nd ser., 59 (1954), 118–20.

⁸⁸ McManus, *A Guide to Ogam*, pp. 73–4.

⁸⁹ See the summary and partial translation by M. Dillon, *The Cycles of the Kings* (London, 1946), pp. 11–29; four relevant texts are ed. and tr. O Daly, *Cath Maige Mucrama*.

side was the king of Corcu Loígde, Mac Con mac Luigdech. The origins of the struggle lay in Munster but it expanded to being a war for supremacy in Ireland. The origin-legends projected this war back into remote prehistory, but that was part and parcel of the language of origin-legend in Ireland: eponymous ancestors represented whole dynasties and peoples. Some of these stories recounting the defeat of the Corcu Loígde by the Éoganachta and the Uí Néill appear to have been written in Munster in the eighth and ninth centuries.⁹⁰ They cannot, therefore, be dismissed as Uí Néill propaganda.⁹¹

A few scraps of annalistic evidence may add further weight to these suspicions. In 597 one of the possible non-Uí Néill kings of Tara, Fiachna son of Báetán, was victorious in 'the battle of Slíab Cúa in the lands of Munster'.⁹² This occurred one year before Áed mac Ainmirech was killed in battle by Brandub mac Echach, king of Leinster.⁹³ Slíab Cúa is, or is part of, the Knockmealdown range in Co. Waterford. Fiachna had already demonstrated an ability to challenge Uí Néill power when he defeated a major client people of the Uí Néill, the Ciannacht Breg, in 594.⁹⁴ The intervention in Munster of this king of the Cruithni, who may also, for a time, have been king of Tara, demonstrates that Munster was not sealed off from the north. More than fifty years earlier, Muirchertach mac Ercae, the half-legendary founder of Cenél nÉogain power in the sixth century, is also said to have campaigned in Munster.⁹⁵ This entry is not contemporary and it would be wrong to put much weight upon it; it gives some limited support to the notion, based on the much more significant annal for 597, that northern rulers were then concerned to play a role within Munster.

The reality of the claims put forward by the kings of Tara to authority even within Munster are also supported by a text, probably of the late eighth or early ninth century, which derives from the province itself, the *Frithfolad Muman*, 'The Counter-Obligations of Munster'. The purpose of the text is to defend the client-kingdoms of Munster against the claims put forward by the Éoganachta. One of the assertions made is that the Múscraige peoples were entitled to a share in the royal prerogative of wreck: 'And the Múscraige are entitled to a third of every

⁹⁰ O Daly, *Cath Maige Mucrama*, p. 18, and, for *Scéla Éogain ocus Cormaic*, also Ó Cathasaigh, *The Heroic Biography of Cormac mac Airt*, pp. 116–17.

⁹¹ This point about material emanating from Leinster and Munster is forcefully made, with further examples, by Bhreathnach, 'Temoria: Caput Scottorum?', 85–7.

⁹² AU (AT, CS) 597.2; Hogan, *Onom.*, p. 607, assembles the evidence for Slíab Cúa.

⁹³ AU (AT) 598.2. ⁹⁴ AU (AT) 594.1.

⁹⁵ AU 533.3; cf. 537.2, a doublet placed after Muirchertach's death (534).

precious object which the wave casts ashore onto the land of Ireland, except for the share of the king of Tara.⁹⁶ The implication is probably that the king of Munster took part of the wreck which came to land within Munster but also handed over a share to the king of Tara, *qua* king of Ireland. The Múscraige claimed a share in the king of Munster's portion (as one of their counter-obligations from the king of Cashel), but did not claim a share in the portion going to the king of Tara. Similarly, the role of Tara as the seat of an hegemony that, in some way or another, embraced all Ireland, is also revealed by the Munster lawtract *Bretha Nemed Toísech*.⁹⁷

(V) THE PARTIALITY OF BAILE CHUINN

Áed mac Ainmirech appears, then, on the evidence of Adomnán and the Annals of Ulster, to have been king of Tara at the time of the meeting at Druimm Cete (though this almost certainly occurred some years later than the date, 575, given in AU). He may initially have shared the kingship with his cousin, Báetán mac Ninneda, since the latter is described as king of Tara in his obit, the date of which was twelve years before Áed's own death (586 and 598). Both of them belonged to Cenél Conaill and both were omitted by *Baile Chuinn*. On the evidence of the annals and Adomnán, therefore, *Baile Chuinn* appears to be a thoroughly partisan document. The evidence in question, however, comes from a single monastery, Iona, ruled by members of Cenél Conaill. It, too, may be thoroughly partisan.

It may also be argued that *Baile Chuinn* omits kings from other branches of the Uí Néill than Cenél Conaill, such as Áed Sláne. This is partly true, as we shall see in a minute, but Áed Sláne, the ancestor of the Fínsnechtae Fledach under whom *Baile Chuinn* may have been composed, may have escaped the editor rather than the original author.⁹⁸ On

⁹⁶ *Dál Caladbuig*, § 9.

⁹⁷ *CIH* 2219.39–40, discussed by Bhreathnach, 'Temoria: Caput Scottorum?', 85–6; similarly *Bretha Nemed Déidenach* (ed. and tr. L. Breatnach, *Ériu*, 40, 1989, 1–40), has several references to Tara but none to Cashel; several references to ancestors of the Uí Néill, such as Cormac mac Airt, but none to Conall Corc, Nad Froich or other ancestors of the Éoganachta; see the index to E. J. Gwynn's edn, 'An Old-Irish Tract on the Privileges and Responsibilities of Poets', *Ériu*, 13 (1940–2), 234.

⁹⁸ Murphy takes 'Gebthus Aid an anruth Aed Ollain bias bith' as referring to a single Áed, the Áed Uaridnach or Áed Allán of the Middle Irish list. It could also be read 'Aid shall take her, noble and venerable, [and] Áed Ollán who shall smite a smiting' or, better, as 'Noble Aid shall take her; venerable is Áed Ollán who shall smite a smiting.' The form *Ollán*, with initial *o*, is found in the Laud genealogies for the later Áed Allán mac Fergaile, *ŽCP*, 8 (1912), 294.29 (cf. 293.27 for Alláin). I take *Ollain* to be a kenning, 'supremely noble', for *Aldán* > *Allán*, derived from *allaid* 'wild', but there may be a play on other words, *á(i)n* 'driving' and *án* 'cup' (containing 'the ale of sovereignty').

the other hand, the omission of both sons of Blathmac mac Áeda Sláne, here contradicting the title given in an annalistic obit,⁹⁹ is likely to be deliberate: Fínsnechtae Fledach had come to the throne by killing Cenn Fáelad mac Blathmaic, in other words by means of a direct onslaught on the position of his first cousins. These two omissions thus accord perfectly with the supposition that *Baile Chuinn* was composed under Fínsnechtae, between 675 and 695. At this period, the main threat to his authority came from Cenél Conaill; *Baile Chuinn* thus does its best to reduce the prestige of that dynasty, but it also betrays the effects of a more local and intimate feud among the descendants of Áed Sláne.

A further ruler not identified by Murphy, but who may have been included in *Baile Chuinn*, is Óengus mac Colmáin Bicc.¹⁰⁰ He was described by the annals as king of the Uí Néill; and I have argued above that his position was likely to have been deputy ruler of the southern Uí Néill during the reign of Suibne Menn of Cenél nÉogain as king of Tara.¹⁰¹ *Baile Chuinn*, however, has an odd sentence which mentions an Óengus: '17Díarmait's justice shall be upon her . . . 18Féachno shall be a cliff over her. 19Suibne shall be better. 20Glorius Óengus, 21Domnall.' Murphy translated §§ 20–1, 'Domnall shall be a glorious Óengus', but it is more easily taken as simply a list. Admittedly the order is not chronologically correct, to judge by annalistic obits:

Díarmait	565
Féachno	?
Suibne	628
Óengus mac Colmáin	621
Domnall	642

Díarmait, however, is also out of chronological sequence, and the inclusion of Óengus as an independent ruler, rather than a mere epithet of Domnall, at least makes better sense of the text. True, among the later king-lists only Marianus included Óengus, but *Baile Chuinn*'s prejudice in favour of the southern Uí Néill, allied with the annalistic title 'king of the Uí Néill', makes the inclusion entirely possible. An explanation would then be that Óengus, a ruler from Mide, regarded by some as a deputy king of the Uí Néill, was argued by partisans of the southern Uí

⁹⁹ AU 671.3; cf. 672.5 for the succession of Cenn Fáelad; similarly, 675.1 and 6.

¹⁰⁰ In AU (here = Chronicle of Ireland) 621.2, Óengus is said to have been a son of Colmán Mór rather than Colmán Becc. This is held to be a mistake because (1) Cland Cholmáin were descendants of Colmán Mór (*LL* var. to *CGH* i.159, i.425); (2) Suibne mac Colmáin, ancestor of Cland Cholmáin, was the son of Colmán Mór (Marianus Scottus' regnal list); (3) Óengus mac Colmáin was the ancestor of Caille Fallomain (*CGH* i.162); (4) the poem on the Airgialla, st. 12, distinguishes Cland Cholmáin Mór and Cland Cholmáin Bicc. ¹⁰¹ Above, pp. 480–1.

Table 12.3. *An emended version of the Middle Irish king-list, 560–642*

<i>Rawlinson etc.</i>	<i>Dynasty</i>	<i>Annals</i>	<i>Adomnán, VSC</i>
7. Domnall and Fergus	Cenél nÉogain	Succeed 565; <i>ob.</i> 566	Cf. i.7
8. Ainmire m. Sétnai	Cenél Conaill	Succeeds 566; <i>ob.</i> 569	Cf. i.7
9. Báetán and Eochaid	Cenél nÉogain	<i>Ob.</i> 572 in third year of reign	Cf. i.12
10. Báetán (m. Ninnedo) and Áed m. Ainmirech	Cenél Conaill	<i>Ob.</i> 586, king of Tara; <i>ob.</i> 598	Cf. i.11
11. Colmán Rímid and Áed Sláne	Cenél nÉogain Southern Uí Néill	<i>Ob.</i> 604	Cf. i.14
12. Áed Allán/ Uaridnach	Cenél nÉogain	<i>Ob.</i> 612, king of Tara	
13. Máel Coba m. Áeda	Cenél Conaill	<i>Ob.</i> 615	
14. Suibne Menn m. Fiachnai	Cenél nÉogain	<i>Ob.</i> 628	
15. Domnall m. Áeda	Cenél Conaill	<i>Ob.</i> 642	Cf. i.10

Néill to have been king, or at least joint-king, of Tara. Similarly, I have assumed that the Suibne of *Baile Chuinn* was Suibne Mend of Cenél nÉogain, but Marianus' pro-Cland Cholmáin list offers an alternative in Suibne mac Colmáin Móir, killed by his uncle Áed Sláne in 600. If he were the person intended, the list would be in correct order.

If *Baile Chuinn* is early but prejudiced in favour of the southern Uí Néill, is the Middle Irish king-list any more reliable, once it has been corrected from the annals and from the regnal list in the Annals of Inisfallen? The next step is to compare the late sixth- and early seventh-century kings, several of whom were omitted by *Baile Chuinn*, with Adomnán's Life of Columba (see table 12.3). Two things are illustrated by the table. The first is the relationship between Adomnán's chapters recounting Columba's prophecies of kings and the list of the kings of Tara:

- i.7 Ainmuire mac Sétnai and Domnall and Forgus sons of Mac Ercae: nos. 7 and 8 as kings of Tara
- i.8 Áedán mac Gabráin, king of Dál Riata, and 'the battle of the Miathi'
- i.9 the succession to Áedán mac Gabráin
- i.10 Domnall mac Áeda: later to be no. 15

i.11 Scandlán mac Colmáin, later king of Osraige

i.12 Báetán mac Maic Ercae and Domnall mac Echdach: no. 9

i.13 Óengus Bronbachall mac Áeda Commáin: king of Cenél Coirpri

i.14 Áed Sláne as co-ruler: no. 11

i.15 Rhydderch ap Tudwal, king of Strathclyde

Adomnán alternates kings of Tara with other rulers; this pattern cannot, however, be shown to be significant, since he never calls any of them king of Tara; the only one of these kings to whom he explicitly attributes an authority beyond that of a particularly powerful king, Áed Sláne, is also the one whom he openly criticises; the only ruler not the subject of one of these prophecies whom he does call king of Ireland is Áed Sláne's father, Díarmait mac Cerbaill, and this is only as an aside.¹⁰² If Adomnán is a propagandist on behalf of the Uí Néill, his methods of persuasion are astonishingly indirect.

Secondly, the revised table shows a particular political pattern in the late sixth century (after the death of Díarmait mac Cerbaill in 565) namely an alternation between Cenél nÉogain and Cenél Conaill. In other words, the northern Uí Néill appear to have shared the kingship of Tara between them. Áed Sláne is the sole exception; and even he had to share the kingship with Colmán Rímid of Cenél nÉogain. It is, however, precisely in this period of northern Uí Néill power that we get the clearest evidence that non-Uí Néill candidates sometimes won the kingship of Tara.

(VI) NON-UI NÉILL KINGS OF TARA

The best approach is to work backwards through the remaining cases, since the clearest evidence exists for the last one, Congal Cáech of the Cruithni. He was defeated and killed by Domnall mac Áeda in the battle of Mag Rath in 637. That battle and the figure of the defeated king became the matter of saga;¹⁰³ that is not surprising inasmuch as Congal Cáech appears to have been the last king of Tara to come from outside the Uí Néill until Brían Bórama in the late tenth century. It could, however, have made it extremely difficult to assess his career. Fortunately, however, a lawtract from the seventh century, *Bechbretha*, mentions in passing that Congal Cáech was king of Tara until he was blinded in one eye by a bee-sting.¹⁰⁴ The blinding caused Congal to be ineligible for the

¹⁰² Adomnán, *VSC* i.14, where Díarmait is referred to, though not by name, as the father of Áed Sláne, and i.36, where Díarmait is mentioned because he was killed by Áed Dub.

¹⁰³ Dillon, *Cycles of the Kings*, pp. 56–74.

¹⁰⁴ *Bechbretha*, ed. Charles-Edwards and Kelly, § 32.

kingship because he was no longer physically perfect, just as, according to Procopius, a Sassanian prince was deemed ineligible because he was blinded in one eye.¹⁰⁵ Apparently, it is unlikely that anyone should be blinded by a bee-sting, but it may well be that a temporary injury was used as a pretext by Congal's enemies. The lawtract is careful to say that Congal's injury was the subject of a judgement by both the Ulstermen and the Féni (the latter including the Uí Néill).¹⁰⁶ Congal Cáech had therefore already lost the kingship of Tara before he was defeated and killed in 637.

The context which made Congal's acquisition of the kingship of Tara possible can be defined quite simply: feuds within both the southern and northern Uí Néill. Cenél Conaill was opposed by Cenél nÉogain; Cenél nÉogain was divided within itself; the descendants of Áed Sláne were continuing to feud with Cland Cholmáin. In the late sixth century Cenél Conaill and Cenél nÉogain had, on the whole, prospered by cooperation – hence their alternation in the kingship of Tara.¹⁰⁷ In 615, however, Máel Coba, son of Áed mac Ainmirech and brother of the Domnall mac Áeda who was to be Congal's principal opponent, was killed by Suibne Mend of Cenél nÉogain. Suibne Mend himself belonged to a branch of Cenél nÉogain called Cenél Feradaig after Suibne's grandfather; this in turn was opposed by Cenél Maic Ercae, descended from Feradach's brother. Congal Cáech killed Suibne Mend in 628, and he is therefore likely to have been an ally of Cenél Maic Ercae and an enemy of Cenél Feradaig. These feuds are best summarised by means of a table (12.4) (for the relevant genealogies, see Appendix II–V).

The feud within the southern Uí Néill may also have had further repercussions. The Middle Irish king-list of Mide in the Book of Leinster says that Airmedach, son of the Conall mac Suibni who was killed in 635, fell in the battle of Mag Rath in 637 together with his son Fáelchú; it adds that Airmedach's killer was Lommainech ('Bareface'), king of the Maugdornai, and that Lommainech was Díarmait mac Áeda's foster-father.¹⁰⁸ According to the annals, Díarmait himself – Lommainech's foster-son – was an ally of Domnall mac Áeda. The likelihood is, then, that Airmedach fought on Congal Cáech's side, whereas Lommainech fought for Domnall mac Áeda.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Procopius, *History of the Wars*, I, II, 4.

¹⁰⁶ *Bechbretha*, § 33.

¹⁰⁷ The cooperation is illustrated by the battle of Cúl Dreimne, 565.

¹⁰⁸ *LL* i.197. These details are not derived from the sagas centred on Congal Cáech; Fáelchú's death in the battle is mentioned in the Clonmacnois annals' version of the event, which seems to be textually superior to that of AU.

¹⁰⁹ Contrary to what I wrote in *Bechbretha*, p. 128.

Table 12.4. *The feuds of the Uí Néill, 600–37*

Southern Uí Néill		Northern Uí Néill		
<i>Brega</i>	<i>Mide</i>	<i>Cenél nÉogain</i>		
		<i>Cenél Feradaig</i>	<i>Cenél Maic Ercae</i>	<i>Cenél Conaill</i>
Áed Sláne	>	Suibne Mend m. Fiachnai Ernaine m. Fiachnai	>	Máel Coba (615)
Áed Sláne	<			
Congal m. Áeda	<			
Ailill m. Áeda	<			
Diarmait m. Áeda	>			
Diarmait m. Áeda	>	Máel Umai m. Óengusa ¹ (635)	Cenél Maic Ercae (636)	

Notes:
[X > Y = X kills Y; X < Y = X is killed by Y]
¹ He was of Cland Cholmáin Bicc (later Coille Follamuin).

Table 12.5. *The opposing sides at Mag Rath*

<i>For Congal Cáech</i>	<i>For Domnall mac Áeda</i>
Cenél nÉogain (Cenél Maic Ercae? ²)	Cenél Conaill
Cruithni	The sons of Áed Sláne (Brega)
Airmedach mac Conaill (Mide)	Lommainech (Maugdornai)
Dál Riata	

The fragment of the Life of St Columba by Cumméne the White, preserved in the Schaffhausen MS of Adomnán's Life, shows that Domnall Brecc, king of Dál Riata, was also Congal Cáech's ally, thus reversing a long alliance between Dál Riata and the Uí Néill which had endured since Columba's day.¹¹⁰ Domnall Brecc is said by Cumméne to have ravaged the province of Domnall mac Áeda (presumably the lands of Cenél Conaill in the north-west), and it is implied that he subsequently participated in the battle of Mag Rath, just to the south of Lough Neagh. These were, therefore, two separate but connected events. The ravaging of Cenél Conaill is not recorded in the annals; it may well be connected with Congal Cáech's assumption of the kingship of Tara. The line-up in the battle of Mag Rath and the associated battle of Saitír seems, therefore, to have been as table 12.5. Even by this date, therefore, when Congal Cáech was no longer king of Tara according to the lawtract, he had allies from both the northern and southern Uí Néill. By their feuds the Uí Néill had succeeded in imperilling the hegemony built up since the late fifth century.

Congal Cáech himself may also have had his local troubles. *Bechbretha* declares that, when Congal Cáech lost the kingship of Tara after his disfigurement by a bee, he charged the owner of the bees with the offence committed against him. The Ulstermen and the Féni then judged that lots should be cast to decide which of the bee-keeper's hives should be forfeit for the blinding of Congal. The whole affair may well have been a piece of elaborate legal pantomime designed to humiliate Congal Cáech – particularly if he was not, in fact, blinded at all.¹¹¹ The Ulstermen said to have been involved were probably not Congal's own Cruithni but their principal rivals within the province of Ulster, Dál

¹¹⁰ Adomnán, *VSC* iii.5.

¹¹¹ It is not impossible that there was a deliberate echo of a story told about Cormac mac Airt being compelled to leave Tara when he was blinded in one eye: Ó Cathasaigh, *The Heroic Biography of Cormac mac Airt*, pp. 69 and 88.

Fiatach. They are not mentioned by the annals as combatants in the battle of Mag Rath; the legal process may indeed have been the occasion when they withdrew their support from Congal.

To judge by what Cumméne the White wrote, Congal Cáech's bid for supremacy must have occurred after the death of Eochaid Buide in 629, since it was the latter's son, Domnall Brecc, who abandoned the alliance with Cenél Conaill and fought with Congal Cáech. The events of 633–5 seem to offer the most likely context. It will be remembered that Domnall mac Áeda's principal allies in 637 were the sons of Áed Sláne, and that in 634 and 635 they had been involved in a new round of the bitter feud with their cousins in Mide, Cland Cholmáin Móir, a feud which also extended to the other main Uí Néill dynasty of Mide, Cland Cholmáin Bicc.¹¹² With that in mind we may approach an entry in the annals for 633: 'The battle of Áth Goan in Western Life, in which Crimthann son of Áed son of Senach, king of the Leinstermen, fell. Fáelán son of Colmán and Conall son of Suibne, king of Mide, and Fáilbe Flann, king of Munster, were the victors.' The line-up was as in table 12.6. During the seventh century the kingship of Leinster rotated between three lineages: the Uí Máil of the Liffey plain as far south as Baltinglas; their neighbours, the Uí Dúnlainge around Maistiú (Mullaghmast, in the south of Co. Kildare); and the Uí Chennselaig around Rathvilly in the north-east of Co. Carlow.¹¹³ In the battle of Áth Goan, fought in the western part of the Liffey plain and thus probably outside the main strongholds of any of the three lineages contending for the kingship of Leinster, Cland Cholmáin Móir and the Éoganacht of Cashel intervened to help the Uí Dúnlainge defeat and kill the Uí Máil king of Leinster, Crimthann son of Áed. Cland Cholmáin Móir were, however, Congal Cáech's allies in 637. Their involvement in this battle suggests that Domnall mac Áeda of Cenél Conaill, supposedly king of Tara at the time, was far from being in control of the midlands. He had attacked Leinster in 628 at the very beginning of Crimthann mac Áeda's reign, but by 633 those among the Uí Néill who were making the running in this area were not Domnall's allies. In the north, also, the balance of

¹¹² AU 635.2.

¹¹³ Uí Chennselaig: Crimthann mac Cennselaig was baptised at Ráith Bilech, Rathvilly, Co. Carlow (s 88 82), *Additamenta* 12.6; Uí Dúnlainge: Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 12, places the son of Dúnlang at Maistiú, the area around Mullaghmast, s 77 96. The Uí Máil probably held much of the Liffey plain at this date; they were later split between the Uí Máil who gave their name to the Glen of Imail on the west side of Lugnaquilla Mt. and the Uí Théig and Uí Chellaig of Cúalu (Cúalu was the area on the east side of the mountains from the Liffey around Dublin approximately as far south as Wicklow Head).

Table 12.6. *The opposing sides at Áth Goan*

<i>Uí Máil</i>	<i>Uí Dúnlainge</i>
Crimthann m. Áeda king of Leinster	Fáelán m. Colmáin <i>Allies</i> (1) Conall m. Suibni, king of Mide, of Cland Cholmáin Móir; killer of Áed Sláne (604), and of his sons, Congal, and Ailill (634); victim (in 635) of Diarmait son of Áed Sláne; father of the Airmedach who was Congal Cáech's ally in 637. (2) Fáilbe Fland, king of Munster, of the Éoganacht of Cashel, who died in the same year as Mag Rath.

power shifted against Domnall *c.* 630: although he had defeated Congal Cáech in 629, his ally Eochaid Buide, king of Dál Ríata, died in the same year, and his successor, Domnall Brecc, switched to Congal Cáech. Congal Cáech could become king of Tara because of a favourable pattern of alliances and feuds extending all the way from Dál Ríata, in what is now Argyll, and the north-east of Co. Antrim, to Leinster and Munster.

On close analysis, therefore, the evidence allows us to say approximately when and how Congal Cáech became king of Tara. Yet neither the Middle Irish king-lists nor *Baile Chuinn* admitted his claims. The case is somewhat different with Fiachna mac Báetáin, also of the Cruithni, who died in 626. In *Baile Chuinn* one king of Tara is named as Féachno, a spelling of Fiachna which can be dated to *c.* 700.¹¹⁴ He immediately precedes Suibne Mend, whose reign is normally given as 615–628; but he is also placed straight after Diarmait mac Cerbail (548–65), and the latter is evidently too late in the list. The position of Féachno in the true chronological sequence of kings named by *Baile Chuinn* cannot, therefore, be determined without further investigation. The evidence usually cited for thinking that the Féachno of *Baile Chuinn* may be the Fiachna mac Báetáin who died in 626 is mostly late: a statement in a Middle Irish saga that he was king of Ireland and Britain; and the title of a lost saga, ‘The Hosting of Fiachna mac Báetáin to Dún nGúaire among the English’, coupled with the identification of Dún nGúaire with the Din Guayroi of the *Historia Brittonum* and both of them with Bamburgh, the

¹¹⁴ Cf. Adomnán, *VSC* i.30, Feachnaus in MS *A* alongside the earlier Fechnaus suggested by the MSS.

royal fortress of the Bernicians.¹¹⁵ The annals fail to offer a clear confirmation of so bold an expedition: late in Fiachna's reign, in 623, the Chronicle of Ireland had the entry 'The storming of Ráith Gúali by Fiachna mac Báetáin.' Gúali might be a miscopied version of Gúairi, and *ráith* can certainly alternate with *dún* as a word for a fortress. The resemblance between Dún Gúairi and Ráith Gúali is inviting but far from conclusive.

The annals do, however, suggest that Fiachna was capable of military interventions at a considerable distance from his north-eastern base. In 597 he is said, as we have seen, to have won the battle of Slíab Cúa in Munster; Slíab Cúa is the old name of the Knockmealdown Mountains between counties Waterford and Tipperary.¹¹⁶ Closer to home, but also closer to Tara, was his victory in 594 over Gerrthide son of Rónán, king of the Cíannacht of Brega.¹¹⁷ Both these victories fell in the last years of what was reckoned by the Middle Irish king-lists as the reign of Áed mac Ainmirech. These were in any case troubled by Brandub mac Echach, king of Leinster, to the point at which it seems doubtful whether Áed mac Ainmirech was still in any position to call himself king of Tara, even before Brandub defeated and killed him in 598.¹¹⁸ The annals, therefore, do not demonstrate that Fiachna mac Báetáin was the Féachno of *Baile Chuinn* or that, if he was, the reality of his authority corresponded to the title. What they do show is that he might well have been recognised as king of Tara at some time in the 590s.

The case of Congal Cáech remains much the most secure. It is, however, reassuring that there is no strong argument for thinking that Congal Cáech's kingship of Tara – in so far as that kingship was held by someone who was not of the Uí Néill – was only an exception that proved the rule of total Uí Néill dominance. The examples of non-Uí Néill kings of Tara require, therefore, a reassessment of the king-lists. We have already seen that *Baile Chuinn* was a partisan text: it upheld the particular dynastic claims of Fínsnechtae Fledach, king of Tara from 675 to 695, and rejected the claims of several Cenél Conaill kings as well as those of Fínsnechtae's immediate rivals and predecessors within the

¹¹⁵ Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, p. 112; P. Mac Cana, *The Learned Tales of Medieval Ireland* (Dublin, 1980), pp. 48, 59. The title is in both versions of the list and is therefore no later than the tenth century. ¹¹⁶ AU 597.2.

¹¹⁷ Cf. AU 594.1 with CGH i.247, allowing for confusion between *mac Crónáin* and *mac Rónáin*. The place, Eudonn Mór, is likely to be the Éodond Mór of *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, ed. O'Rahilly, lines 125–6. This appears to have been in the area later known as Fir Arda Ciannachtae, between the Boyne and the Dee: compare Map 11 in T. Kinsella (tr.), *The Táin* (Oxford, 1970), pp. xx–xxi. ¹¹⁸ AU 590.3; 597.1; 598.2.

Brega lineage, Síl nÁeda Sláne. The Middle Irish king-lists are a somewhat more difficult case. They appear to go back to a single original, whose viewpoint is close to that of the annals. In particular, the Cenél Conaill kings rejected by *Baile Chuinn* are generally accepted by both the Middle Irish king-lists and the Chronicle of Ireland.

(VII) THE ANNALS AND THE KING-LISTS

The coincidence of the annals and the king-lists (apart from *Baile Chuinn*) on the kingship of Tara may be shown by a table in which the various categories of annalistic evidence for the kingship of Tara are shown in one column alongside the revised king-list. Only entries already present in the Chronicle of Ireland are included (table 12.7). The king-list is best approached by examining first the period *c.* 740–847, that is, the period after the annals ceased to be composed on Iona and moved to the Irish midlands. What the annals betray at that period is a definite preference for Cland Cholmáin (Móir) as against Cenél nÉogain. At the same period, Cland Cholmáin was allied with the community of Columba, while the alliance between Cenél nÉogain and Armagh was equally marked.¹¹⁹ The link with Cland Cholmáin long predated the building of the monastery of Kells, as shown by the promulgation of the Law of Colum Cille in 753 and 778.¹²⁰ What appears to have happened, therefore, is that the annals were continued after *c.* 740 in a church in the midlands allied to, or a member of, the Columban federation. On the other hand, the prejudice in favour of Cland Cholmáin does not extend to excising from the record entries which imply Cenél nÉogain tenure of the kingship of Tara; moreover the bias seems to fade in the last seventy years of the Chronicle of Ireland (840–911): both Níall Caille and his son, Áed Findliath, were recognised in their obits as kings of Tara.¹²¹

The preceding century, 640–740, has a very different, but equally definite character. Whereas 740–840 is marked by emphatic obits of Cland Cholmáin kings of Tara, 640–740 is the period of regnal *incipits* and a much more even-handed approach, respecting the claims of several dynasties. There is a tendency to become rather more partisan in the early eighth century, when kings of Cenél nÉogain and Síl nÁeda Sláne go without clear recognition of their claims but from 640–710 the annalist is at his most dispassionate, much more so than *Baile Chuinn*.

¹¹⁹ Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, pp. 63–7.

¹²¹ AU 846.3; 879.1.

¹²⁰ AU 753.4; 778.4; cf. also 757.9.

Table 12.7. *An emended version of the Middle Irish king-list to 846*

Ob. evidence for kingship of Tara (or Ireland) in the obit, for example, 612: ‘The death of Áed Alddán son of Domnall, king of Tara.’ An entry is also counted as an obit for these purposes if it is coupled with a succession entry, and the two kings came from different kingdoms, for example, 544: Túathal Máelgarb was killed, and Diarmait son of Cerball succeeded him.

Succeeds as with Diarmait mac Cerbaill above.

Incipit Entries of the form (672): ‘Cenn Fáelad son of Blathmac begins to reign.’

<i>King</i>	<i>Dynasty</i>	<i>Chronicle of Ireland</i>
1. Lóegaire m. Néill		Feast 454
2. Ailill Molt	Uí Fíachrach	Feast 467
3. Lugaid m. Lóegairi		
4. Muirchertach/Mac Ercae	Cenél nÉogain	
5. Túathal Máelgarb	Cenél Coirpri	Obit 544
6. Diarmait mac Cerbaill	S. Uí Néill	Succeeds 544 Feast 558
7. Domnall and Fergus	Cenél nÉogain	Succeed 565
8. Ainmire m. Sétnai	Cenél Conaill	Succeeds 566
9. Báetán and Eochaid	Cenél nÉogain	572 is third yr. of reign
10. Báetán (m. Ninnedo) and Áed m. Ainmirech	Cenél Conaill	Obit 586
	Cenél Conaill	—
11. Colmán Rimid and Áed Sláne	Cenél nÉogain	—
	S. Uí Néill	—
12. Áed Allán/Uaridnach	Cenél nÉogain	Obit 612
13. Máel Coba m. Áeda	Cenél Conaill	—
14. Suibne Menn m. Fíachnai	Cenél nÉogain	—
15. Domnall m. Áeda	Cenél Conaill	Obit 642
16. Connall & Cellach maic Máele Coba	Cenél Conaill	Incipit 643?
17. Bláimac and Diarmait maic Áeda Sláne	Síl nÁeda Sláne	Incipit 643?
18. Sechnassach m. Bláimaic	Síl nÁeda Sláne	Obit 671
19. Cenn Fáelad m. Bláimaic	Síl nÁeda Sláne	Incipit 672
20. Fínsnechtae Fledach m. Dúinchada	Síl nÁeda Sláne	Incipit 675 Obit 695
21. Loingsech m. Óengusa	Cenél Conaill	Incipit 696, Obit 703
22. Congal Cennmagair	Cenél Conaill	Obit 710
23. Fergal m. Máele Dúin	Cenél nÉogain	
24. Fogartach m. Néill	Síl nÁeda Sláne	—
25. Cináed mac Írgalaig	Síl nÁeda Sláne	—
26. Flaithbertach m. Loingsig	Cenél Conaill	Obit 765
27. Áed Allán	Cenél nÉogain	—
28. Domnall m. Murchada	Cland Cholmáin	Obit 763
29. Niall Frossach	Cenél nÉogain	—
30. Donnchad mac Domnail	Cland Cholmáin	Obit 797
31. Áed Oirdnide	Cenél nÉogain	—
32. Conchobar m. Donnchada	Cland Cholmáin	Obit 833
33. Niall Caille	Cenél nÉogain	Obit 846

The century 540–640 is the period of combined obit and succession; it contains the sketchiest annalistic record of the kingship of Tara, and yet it is also the period of greatest Cenél Conaill dominance, the period reflected by Adomnán's Life of Columba and the period of the greatest disagreement between *Baile Chuinn* and the Middle Irish king-lists. It also appears to be a period in which the annalistic record of the kingship of Tara was, in one way, more partisan than it was to be between 640 and 710: the non-Uí Néill claimants, Báetán mac Cairill, Fiachna mac Báetáin and Congal Cáech, were opposed by Cenél Conaill rivals, and none of them finds a place in the annalistic record of the kings of Tara or in the Middle Irish king-lists. On the other hand, the Chronicle of Ireland for this period appears to have been without bias in favour of one branch of the Uí Néill as against another.

Finally, 432–540 is the period when the annals mark the kingship of Tara by noting that a king is holding the Feast of Tara, a ceremony which has been seen as pagan and as a celebration of the sacred marriage between the king and the goddess of the land.¹²² It does not follow that all these kings were themselves pagan, since such customs may have been preserved as long as there was a significant pagan element within the population. A comparison between the king-lists and the annals reveals, therefore, a striking general agreement alongside shifts both in the fullness of the record and in the degree of partisanship. Yet any such partisanship, even at its strongest, seems to have led to silences in the record rather than to fabrication.

The most puzzling period in the annalistic record is undoubtedly 590–650. Although, as we have seen, non-Uí Néill candidates were rejected, there is little sign of any bias as between the different Uí Néill dynasties. Although the source is a set of annals written on Iona, and the abbots of Iona were not only members of Cenél Conaill but committed to their kinsmen's political fortunes, both Máel Coba of Cenél Conaill and Suibne Mend of Cenél nÉogain passed without any notice of their status as kings of Tara; Suibne Mend, however, was recognised even by *Baile Chuinn*. One aspect which may be exerting an influence on the record is, quite unexpectedly, the manner of death. Adomnán, in his Life of Columba, shows considerable interest in whether kings die by violent deaths – the *ugulatio* or *occisio* of the annals – or die peacefully. Thus he says of Domnall mac Áeda, not that he was king of Tara (Adomnán never used that term of anybody), but that Columba prophesied that he

¹²² Binchy, 'The Fair of Tailtiu and the Feast of Tara', 134–8; idem, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship*, pp. 11–12; Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, pp. 16–18.

Table 12.8. *Chronicle of Ireland 590–650*

<i>Those recorded as kings of Tara</i>	<i>Dynasty</i>	<i>Manner of death</i>	<i>Obit</i>
12. Áed Allán	Cenél nEógain	<i>mors</i> : non-violent ¹²⁶	612
15. Domnall mac Áeda	Cenél Conaill	<i>mors</i> : non-violent	642
<i>Those not recorded as kings of Tara</i>			
10b. Áed mac Ainmirech	Cenél Conaill	fell in battle	598
11a. Colmán Rímid	Cenél nEógain	assassinated	604
11b. Áed Sláne	S. Uí Néill	killed in feud	604
13. Máel Coba	Cenél Conaill	killed	615
14. Suibne Mend	Cenél nEógain	killed in battle	628

Notes:

¹ *Mors* ceased to have any particular implication of non-violence after *c.* 740.

would be ‘a very famous king. He will never be delivered into the hands of enemies, but will die on his bed by a peaceful death, in old age, and surrounded by a crowd of his household companions.’¹²³ When, however, he heard his servant, Diarmait, and Laisrán mac Feradaig talking about two earlier kings of Tara, Báetán and Echaid, he rebuked them: ‘My children, why do you thus idly chat about these men? For both of those kings of whom you are now talking have recently perished, having been decapitated by their enemies.’¹²⁴

With Adomnán’s remarks in mind, and remembering also the traditional annalist’s interest in forms of death, the kings of Tara between 590 and 650 may be divided between those who were recorded as such and those who were not, and between those who suffered violent deaths and those who, like Domnall mac Áeda, died in their beds (see table 12.8).

In this period, then, if we adopt Adomnán’s terms, those of whom ‘it is idle to speak’ (because they died by violence) were not recorded in the annals as kings of Tara; those who died in their beds were. On this showing, the annalist was guided by considerations which could hardly have been more remote from dynastic propaganda in favour of Cenél Conaill. Furthermore, if this was what governed recognition as king of Tara in the annals between 590 and 650, it was not to be expected that the annalist should recognise either Fiachna mac Báetáin or Congal Cáech: both died violent deaths. In other words, the annalist at this period may not have been a partisan supporter either of the Uí Néill as

¹²³ Adomnán, *VSC* i.10. ¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, i.12.

a whole or any branch of the Uí Néill. Indeed, it seems that partisanship was largely absent from the Iona annals until the eighth century. Moreover, once we have made allowance for this particular consideration in the period 590–650, the annals and the king-lists turn out to agree to a remarkable extent on who was and who was not king of Tara.

The close agreement between some king-lists and the annals makes it necessary to choose between two sharply contrasting views of the kingship of Tara. A sceptical analysis has seen the coincidence of king-lists and annals as evidence for later editing of the annals in the interests of the Uí Néill, most plausibly to be assigned to the period *c.* 911, when the Chronicle of Ireland was being compiled.¹²⁵ Kelleher, the principal advocate of this view, argued memorably that ‘The Uí Néill emerge into history like a school of cuttlefish from a large ink-cloud of their own manufacture; and clouds and ink continue to be manufactured by them or for them throughout their long career.’¹²⁶ Following this line of argument, it might be claimed that both annals and king-lists derive from the one historiographical effort, and that the Middle Irish king-lists therefore go back to an original composed *c.* 911. An alternative reading of the evidence would assign the earlier annalistic information on the kingship of Tara to the Iona annals compiled from the second half of the sixth century up to *c.* 740.

The evidence presented in the emended version of the Middle Irish king-list argues strongly against any theory which would assign all of the annalistic material on the kingship of Tara to the beginning of the tenth century, that is to the last period of a single Chronicle of Ireland. The prejudice in favour of Cland Cholmáin faded as the Viking attacks became more serious, while the prejudice in favour of Cenél Conaill is much more easily explained as a feature of the Iona annals rather than of the Chronicle of Ireland. Even within the period of the Iona annals, before *c.* 740, there were distinct phases in the record, some more partisan than others. Some were also, perhaps, more telescoped than others. The period 540–640 was marked by obit-plus-succession entries, with the effect that succession to the kingship seems to be immediate. In the next century, characterised by *incipit* entries, this is no longer so. We may contrast two clear examples:

- (1) *Apparently immediate*: AU 565.1: Occissio Diarmato m. Cerbuill, cui sucesserunt duo filii Mc. Erce, Forgus 7 Domnall (‘The killing of

¹²⁵ J. V. Kelleher, ‘The Táin and the Annals’, *Ériu*, 22 (1971), 113–15; idem, ‘Early Irish History and Pseudo-History’, *Studia Hibernica*, 3 (1963), 120–7.

¹²⁶ Kelleher, ‘Early Irish History and Pseudo-History’, 125.

Díarmait son of Cerball, to whom the two sons of Mac Erce, Forgus and Domnall, succeeded.)

- (2) *After an interval*: AU 695.1: Fínsnechta rex Temhro 7 Bresal filius eius iugulati sunt apud Aedh m. Dluthaigh 7 Congalach m. Conaing ('Fínsnechtae, king of Tara, and Bresal his son were killed by Áed son of Dlúthach and Congalach son of Conaing.')

696.6: Congalach m. Conaing filii Congaile filii Aedho Slane moritur ('Congalach son of Conaing son of Congal son of Áed Sláne dies.')

696.7: Loingsech regnare incipit ('Loingsech begins to reign.')

The record of Loingsech's succession appears to be thoroughly realistic: it comes not only a year after the death of Fínsnechtae, but also immediately after the death of one of the latter's killers, who was also a potential rival.

On the other hand, the *incipit* type entry for 643 is the most obviously retrospective of the entire series, even though it comes after an interregnum (the italicised portion is not in the Annals of Ulster but only in the Clonmacnois annals):

AU 642.1: The death of Domnall son of Áed, king of Ireland, at the end of January in *the 14th year of his reign, in Ard Fothaid*.

AU 643.7: Here there is doubt as to who reigned after Domnall. Some historiographers say that four kings, namely Cellach and Conall Cóel and the two sons of Áed Sláne, namely Díarmait and Blathmac, ruled in shared reigns.

The hesitation of the annalist is perhaps reflected in the disagreement with the king-list which has two successive reigns of two kings rather than one of four.

The impression given is one of periodic editing of the annals, perhaps as a fair copy was made at intervals of less tidy contemporary entries. Some of the entries concerning the kingship of Tara, such as AU 643.7, were added, or changed, as a part of this editing process; others, such as the obit of Domnall mac Áeda in the previous year, may have been contemporary. Yet even when entries were retrospective, and belonged to an editor rather than to the contemporary record, they still respected the phases distinguished above. The retrospective entry about the four kings of Tara is still of the *incipit* type and belongs to the period 640–740. The editing in question was not, therefore, remote from the events themselves. The close relationship between the annals and the king-lists can now be seen as evidence, not for some major rewriting of the past *c.* 900, but for a long evolution of a record originating close to the events, some-

times contemporary, sometimes edited a generation or two later. Moreover, although the king-lists are close to the annals, they are at least partially independent; this is illustrated by the different lines annals and lists take on the succession to Domnall mac Áeda.

The king-lists are, therefore, valuable evidence for the kingship of Tara. This is not to say either that they are impartial or that they do not contain simple errors. *Baile Chuinn* is useful especially because it can be placed in the reign of Finšnechtae Fledach and understood in terms of his concerns. It is also more reliable than the Middle Irish king-list for the period before 565, as shown by its inclusion of Coirpre mac Néill, and likewise somewhat more reliable after 565 on the issue of non-Uí Néill kings of Tara. The Middle Irish king-list is much the more impartial as between the different Uí Néill dynasties after 565.

(VIII) VARIATIONS IN THE POWER OF THE KING OF TARA

Although it was possible to record a succession of kings of Tara broken only by brief interregna, the authority enjoyed by these kings undoubtedly varied very considerably. Such variation was taken for granted by Adomnán when he wrote of a prophecy made by Columba to Áed Sláne:

A prophecy of the blessed man about the son of King Diarmait who in the Irish language was called Áid Sláne.

On another occasion, when the blessed man was staying for some days in Ireland, and the aforementioned Áid came to him, he spoke to him prophetically thus: 'My son, you must take care lest by reason of the sin of kin-slaying you lose the prerogative of the monarchy of the whole of Ireland predestined for you by God. For if ever you commit that sin, you will enjoy, not the whole kingdom of your father, but only some part of it, within your *gens*, and for only a short time.'¹²⁷

According to Adomnán, the kingdom enjoyed by Áed's father, Diarmait son of Cerball, comprised the whole of Ireland. Áed's authority, therefore, was to be extended over a much more restricted area than Ireland; it was to be restricted to his *gens*, and perhaps not to the whole even of that, and it was to last only a short time. Here again, Adomnán's information is close to that of the annals, but put in quite different terms. The latter reveal that Áed killed his nephew, Suibne, in 600, only to be killed himself four years later by Suibne's son, Conall.

¹²⁷ Adomnán, *VSC* i.14.

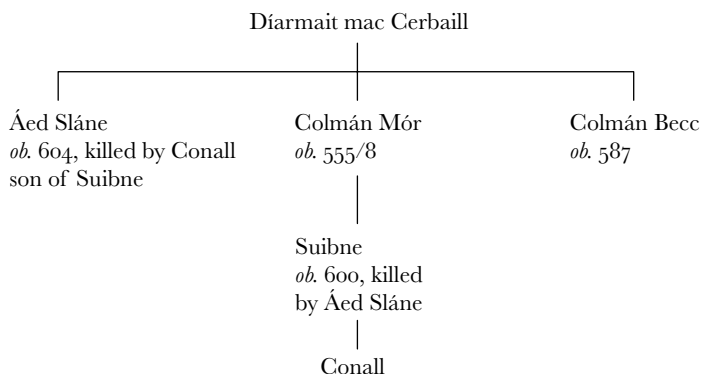
The kingship of Tara

Fig. 12.2. The feuds of the Southern Uí Néill

On the other hand, the annalistic record of Aed Sláne's authority as king of Tara is problematic. The Clonmacnois annals have an entry under the year corresponding to AU 598, 'The beginning of the joint-reign of Colmán Rímid and Áed Sláne.'¹²⁸ This is not in the Annals of Ulster, which have instead a note attached to the obits of Áed Sláne and Colmán Rímid, s.a. 604: 'They ruled Tara together with equal power.' It is entirely possible, therefore, that no annalistic notice of Áed Sláne's kingship of Tara was in the Chronicle of Ireland in 911. One cannot, however, be sure, since the extant annals have both added to and subtracted from the original Chronicle. The Clonmacnois version of the entry on the beginning of the reign is the more suspect, since these annals include several such entries, which do not appear in the Annals of Ulster. But they might well have omitted an entry such as the one in the Annals of Ulster, since they had already given the information in tidier form under 598. At all events, what the annals imply is consistent with Adomnán's information.

Adomnán is, however, more specific in one important respect. He says that Áed Sláne's kingdom was to be confined within his own *gens*, by which he meant the Connachta.¹²⁹ The Uí Néill originated as a lineage within the *gens* of the Connachta; moreover, as was pointed out in the previous chapter, they cannot have conceived of themselves as an independent lineage until the second quarter of the sixth century, the period at which Áed Sláne's father, Díarmait mac Cerbaill, was in his youth.

¹²⁸ AT, ed. Stokes, p. 122 of the reprint; CS 598; AClon., ed. Murphy, p. 97.

¹²⁹ This is the implication of Adomnán's use of the word *gens*; see *EIWK*, pp. 141–5, 163–4.

The contemporary elegy on the death of Columba in 597 depicts him both as a member of the Connachta, *moccu Chuinn*, and as a descendant of Níall. In 663 the annals have the obit of an abbot of Bangor called Ségán *moccu Chuinn*. If we then look at the obits of kings of the Connachta which can be assigned to the Chronicle of Ireland, they have an interesting pattern. After some early examples, those from the sixth, seventh and eighth centuries are as follows:

561.1	756.2
649.1	768.1
682.1	773.3
705.3	779.2
728.5	782.2

The evidence for the phrase *moccu Chuinn*, 'member of the *gens* of Conn', which comes to an end in the third quarter of the seventh century, is largely in complementary distribution with the evidence for kings of the Connachta. It may be said that this reflects a lack of interest on the part of the Iona annalist in the affairs of Connaught. To a considerable extent this is true, but Cenél Conaill, and even more its ally Cenél Coirpri, had definite ambitions in north-eastern Connaught.¹³⁰ There were Columban churches in or on the edge of the province, possibly already in the seventh century.¹³¹

An alternative explanation is that, until the second half of the seventh century, Uí Néill kings of Tara were kings of the Connachta, just as the Uí Néill continued to regard themselves as part of the Connachta until the same period. This theory finds some support from the occasional reference to lands held by particular Uí Néill lineages within the province.¹³² Although Tírechán, himself a Connaught man writing at the end of the seventh century, distinguishes between the lands of the Uí Néill to the east of the Shannon and the lands of the Connachta to the west, he has not the slightest difficulty in imagining the ancestors of his own lineage appealing to the judicial authority of the king of Tara, Lóegaire mac Néill. This may be just one more improbable item in the great legend of Lóegaire and Patrick; but it may also reflect a real, but

¹³⁰ Cenél Coirpri Dromma Cliab lay within Connaught, and so, even, could Cenél Conaill: see above, pp. 37–8. Examples of Cenél Coirpri interest in the lands in northern Connaught are AU 603.2; 683.2; 703.2.

¹³¹ One possibility is Cell Mór Diathraib (Kilmore, Co. Roscommon): see Adomnán, *VSC* i.42. Another is Drumcliff, Co. Sligo; although there is no proof that Drumcliff was a Columbanian church before the Viking period (Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, p. 283, n. 391), the close early connection between Cenél Conaill and Cenél Coirpri makes it quite likely that the connection is old.

¹³² *VT*² 879–82; *CGH* i.153 (143 a 8–9).

earlier, situation in which the Shannon was not so important a barrier as it later became.¹³³

There may also have been a transitional stage in which the Southern Uí Néill were more clearly separated from the Connachta than were their northern kinsmen of Cenél Conaill and Cenél nÉogain. Deputy kings of the Southern Uí Néill seem to have been called 'kings of the Uí Néill'; but deputy kings of the Northern Uí Néill were known as 'kings of the North'.¹³⁴ The sole example in the Chronicle of Ireland of the title 'king of the Connachta' from the period 500–650 may refer to a deputy king of the same type as 'the king of the Uí Néill' – a title occasionally used among the midland dynasties. The occasion of this sole example was the battle of Cúl Dreimne, in which Diarmait mac Cerbaill was defeated by an alliance consisting of Forggus and Domnall, the two sons of Mac Ercae of Cenél nÉogain, together with Diarmait's successors, Airmire mac Sétnai and Nainnid mac Duach of Cenél Conall, and Áed mac Echach, king of the Connachta.¹³⁵ In other words, the alliance consisted of the Northern Uí Néill and the king of the Connachta. Moreover Adomnán's words addressed to Áed Sláne imply that Diarmait mac Cerbaill ruled over the whole *gens* of the Connachta, including the Uí Néill, as well as other dynasties. In other words, if Áed mac Echach's title is correct, he was either a vassal subject to Diarmait or a deputy king on his behalf.¹³⁶ Áed belonged to the Uí Briúin, yet the Uí Fiachrach were the most powerful dynasty among the Connachta in the sixth and seventh centuries. It may be, therefore, that Diarmait built up Áed as a deputy to balance the Uí Fiachrach, before he rebelled in alliance with the Northern Uí Néill.

This line of division between the Southern Uí Néill and the other Connachta has a later echo. Tírechán's *Collectanea* are divided into two books, the first devoted to the lands of the Uí Néill, meaning the Southern Uí Néill, and a second on the lands of the Connachta. It looks as though the second book stretches at least as far as chapter 47, when Patrick crosses the Foyle going eastwards.¹³⁷ Tírechán has, therefore, lumped together the Connachta and the Northern Uí Néill. When he talks earlier of the descendants of Níall's son Conall inheriting authority over the descendants of his other sons, there is no doubt that Tírechán was thinking of Conall Cremthainne, ancestor of the main Southern Uí Néill dynasties, and not of Conall Gulban, ancestor of

¹³³ Cf. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, pp. 91–3.

¹³⁴ AU 621.2; 715.2; 747.4; 788.1. But cf. also 'the Uí Néill of the North', *ibid.*, 563.1.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 561.1.

¹³⁶ He is not given the title in his obit, AU 577.4.

¹³⁷ See above, pp. 37–8.

Cenél Conaill. Tírechán was doubtless singing the tune of Fínsnechtæ Fledach, during whose reign he was writing; but his tendentiousness, however calculated, has some basis in sentiment, as shown by the titles for the deputy kings, the southern 'kings of the Uí Néill' as against the 'kings of the North'.

The same sentiment is also revealed even as late as the eighth century in the accounts of the battle of Allen in 722, in which Fergal mac Máele Dúin, king of Tara, was defeated and killed by the Leinstermen. There is a short version of the entry on this battle in the Annals of Ulster and a longer one, perhaps influenced by saga, in the Clonmacnois annals. In the latter, the client-kings who fought and died in Fergal's army were divided into two groups: on the one hand, there were the kings of 'the kindred of Conn', who were also described as 'the kings of the North', such as those of Cenél Coirpri, Cenél Conaill, the Airgíalla and Cenél nÉogain itself; on the other hand, there were the kings of the Uí Néill of the South, the rulers of Síl nÁeda Sláne and their neighbours.¹³⁸ When, in 738, Fergal's son, Áed Allán, took revenge for his father's death, his victory was described as being gained by 'the descendants of Conn'.¹³⁹ It is doubtful if that description would have been used if the leader of the army had been from the Southern Uí Néill.

It may be tempting to play the hard-headed sceptic and declare that the king of Tara was merely the king of the Uí Néill, but that phrase itself, 'king of the Uí Néill', can now be seen to beg several questions about the different identities of the various lineages within the Uí Néill. One reason why the Northern Uí Néill appear to have been more prone to hang on to their identity as part of the Connachta, or at least, as part of an entity which should by rights have been synonymous with Connachta but was not, Dál Cuinn, was the central role in their political edifices occupied by the Airgíalla. The Airgíalla were a collection of peoples stretching from the Foyle basin to the northern borderlands of Brega in a great swathe across northern Ireland from north-west to south-east. Crucially, they included the kingdom in which Armagh was situated. As the Ciannacht Breg, the Luigni and the Gailenga formed the armies of the Southern Uí Néill, so the Airgíalla were a major part of the armed force of kings of Cenél Conaill and Cenél nÉogain.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, as the alliance between Cenél nÉogain and Armagh gathered

¹³⁸ AT, ed. Stokes, pp. 188–9; the different annalistic lists are compared by P. Ó Riain, *Cath Almaine*, Medieval and Modern Irish Ser., 25 (Dublin, 1978), pp. 67–9.

¹³⁹ This entry was in the Chronicle of Ireland.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. the kings killed in the battle of Allen, 722, with those killed at the battle of Serethmag in 743, the kings of the Airthir, Uí Chremthainn and Uí Thuirtri: AU 743.4.

force in the eighth century, opposed by a parallel alliance between the Columban federation and Cland Cholmáin, so the Southern Uí Néill placed themselves under the banner of an Uí Néill saint, but Cenél nÉogain turned to Patrick, and therefore to his heirs, who came from Airgíallan royal lineages, usually from the Airthir, 'the Easterners', sometimes from the Uí Chremthainn.¹⁴¹ The Airgíalla, however, also claimed to belong to Dál Cuinn; they thus considered themselves entitled to the status of privileged clients of the Uí Néill.¹⁴² Because of the increasingly close relationship between Cenél nÉogain and the Airgíalla, the overlords, as well as their clients, were willing to appeal to their shared identity as Dál Cuinn.

The relationship between political identity and the kingship of Tara goes further, however, than the exploitation of a belief in common descent from Conn Cétchathach. Since the Irish had an unusually unified culture, seen most notably in their dialect-free literary language (what we know as Old Irish), perceptions of identity and difference within this culture took different forms from those found, for example, within the Merovingian kingdoms. So far as is known, Leinstermen were not marked out from the peoples ruled by the Uí Néill by their clothing or the way they wore their hair, as were the Saxons of the Bessin from the Bretons.¹⁴³ Since the Irish lacked clear cultural differences, but possessed a social structure in which kinship was crucial, common descent became the language of shared community. This was then extended to expressing relationships between overlord and vassal. Eventually, the entire political landscape could be moulded by an enduring hegemony, such as that of the Uí Néill, to the point at which the identities of their vassals were understood in terms of relationships to the Uí Néill.

(IX) THE AIRGÍALLA AND THE UÍ NÉILL

Both the Airgíalla and the Cíannachta were prominent in the armies of the Uí Néill. Although they might have their special allegiances, in principle both might serve in the forces of any Uí Néill king of Tara.¹⁴⁴ These military obligations came to be expressed in their origin-legends,

¹⁴¹ For example, Dub da Leithe mac Sinaig, *ob.* 793, of the Airthir (*CGH* i.183), was succeeded by two candidates, Fáendelach mac Móenaig, *ob.* 795, and Gormgal mac Dindathaig/Dindanaig of the Uí Chremthainn (cf. *AU* 793.4 and 806.2). Gormgal was one of three abbots of Armagh whose names were not commemorated at Armagh in the Mass, 'because they took the abbacy by force' (*LL* i.200). Compare the legendary alliance of the Airthir and the Uí Néill in Muirchú, *Vita S. Patricii*, ii.13, seeking to wrest the relics of Patrick from the Ulaid. ¹⁴² *CGH* i.137, 147, 152 (142 b 31).

¹⁴³ Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* x.9.

¹⁴⁴ 'A Poem on the Airgíalla', ed. O Daly, stanzas 11–13, 23–5.

the stories which told how they came to be the peoples they now were. The origin-legends of the Airgíalla and the Cíannachta share a theme: they, not the Uí Néill, did the real fighting. The Cíannachta were only done out of the proper reward of their ancestor's conquest of Brega – namely Tara – by a trick.¹⁴⁵ The Airgíalla conquered the lands of central northern Ireland by defeating the Ulstermen on behalf of the Uí Néill: they made 'swordland' of half Ulster in seven days of hard fighting.¹⁴⁶

The Airgíalla origin-tale is usually known as 'The Three Collas' after the supposed ancestors of the three divisions of the Airgíalla, all three of whom were called Colla (earlier Conlae).¹⁴⁷ At the date at which the story is set the king of Tara was Muiredach Tírech, grandfather to Níall Noígíallach. The Collas were his 'enforcers of lordship' as befitted their military role.¹⁴⁸ Since, however, we are in the period before Níall, ancestor of the Uí Néill, the latter should not have been distinguished from the Connachta. Yet, for the purposes of the story, Muiredach represents, not the Connachta, but the Uí Néill. The Connachta appear in the form of a mere joke as 'the Men of Unintoxicating Drinks'.¹⁴⁹ On the other hand, the relationship between the Connachta and the Airgíalla as common descendants of Conn is preserved in the story of how they jointly carved swordland out of Ulster on behalf of Muiredach, meaning the Uí Néill:

The Collas then went to the Men of Unintoxicating Drinks and became their foster-sons and they received them with love and honour. Then the Men of Unintoxicating Drinks came with the Collas and fought seven battles with them against the Ulstermen at the Cairn of the 'Field Red on One Side' in Fernmag, that is, six battles were fought by the Men of Unintoxicating Drinks and the seventh by the Collas themselves. The Ulstermen were defeated each day. The last day was the battle of the Collas. No boast was empty on that day. The battle was fought for a summer day and a summer night until the blood came up to the shields.¹⁵⁰ It is beside the Cairn of the Hazels of the Injured. Then the

¹⁴⁵ *CGH* i.403–5. The independent object pronouns indicate that this version of the story is of the twelfth century, but the historical content suggests that it is a reworking of Old Irish material, now newly relevant in a period when the decline of Norse Dublin was permitting the peoples of what had been southern Brega to enjoy more independence.

¹⁴⁶ *CGH* i.147–52, tr. M. A. O'Brien, 'The Oldest Account of the Raid of the Collas (circa AD 330)', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 3rd series, 2 (1939), 170–7.

¹⁴⁷ One text explains that they had separate names before they committed kin-slaying, Áed and Muiredach and Cairrell: *CGH* i.130 (137 b 54–5).

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, i.150 (but 'champions of battle' in another branch of the MS tradition).

¹⁴⁹ Fir Ól nEcmacht. O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology*, p. 12, refuses to give an explanation; the one given here is due to Prof. Donnchadh Ó Corráin. If the drink in question was 'the ale of sovereignty' the joke may have been serious.

¹⁵⁰ *Fern*, 'alder, alder-wood', is used for shields made of alder-wood, but there is also a play on the name of the kingdom, *Fernmag*, 'Alder-Plain'.

Ulstermen were routed by the Collas at the beginning of the second day, and the fighting went as far as Glenn Rígi (the Glen of Kingship). Afterwards they spent a week cutting down the Ulstermen and they made swordland of the land in which the Mugdorna live, and the Uí Chremthainn together with the Airthir and the Uí Maccu Úais and the others.¹⁵¹

This story was put together in the eighth century probably by someone sympathetic to the rulers of Fernmag (between Clones and Monaghan).¹⁵² It is somewhat academic in character, to judge by the style of humour, but it expresses in succinct narrative the essence of the relationship between the Airgialla and the Uí Néill as the Airgialla wished it to be.

In genealogical form, that relationship was as shown in fig. 12.3.¹⁵³ The reason why this scheme is of particular historical interest is that it is false. This is shown by the name of the northern group of the Airgialla, descended from Colla Úais, the Uí Maccu Úais.¹⁵⁴ Their name appears in various forms in the sources, commonly as Uí Mc. Úais, where *Mc.* is an abbreviation for *mac* 'son' or the inflectional form *maic* / *meic*. It is also found as Uí Mc. Cúais, and in Latin guise as *nepotes filiorum Cuais*.¹⁵⁵ What these various forms, taken together with the personal name Colla Úais (or earlier, Conlae Óiss), show is that the original form of the name was Aui Maccu Óiss/Úais, namely 'the descendants of a member of the *gens* Úas'. This, however, renders improbable any claim to membership of the *gens* named after Conn, Dál Cuind, *alias* the Connachta.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵¹ *CGH* i.151.

¹⁵² Namely the Uí Nad Slúaig branch of the Uí Chremthainn; this is suggested by the siting of the battles in Fernmag (their kingdom).

¹⁵³ *CGH* i.139–46 is the first *peritia* of the Airgialla (of the eighth century to judge by examples of Conla[e] Óis for the later Colla Úais; *-nl-* > *-ll-* occurred *c.* 800); the second is the *alia peritia* of *CGH* i.147–53, probably of *c.* 800 and giving pride of place to the Uí Chremthainn; the notes added, pp. 153–5, seem to be mainly late ninth century (Máel Bresail, 143 a 20, *oh.* 825). The Airgiallan pedigrees in *CGH* i.180–85 are appended to the Cenél nÉogain genealogies, 175–80, and are of the eleventh century (cf. Mac Neill, 'Notes on the Laud Genealogies', 411–18, on the Laud version); they give pride of place to the Airthir, including Cland Sinaig of Armagh (p. 181).

¹⁵⁴ It also had southern branches in Mide and Brega, but in the genealogical scheme of the Airgialla the Uí Maccu Úais were seen as northern and were divided into two groups: Uí Maccu Úais 'to the north of the mountain' and Uí Maccu Úais 'to the south of the mountain', *CGH* i.415. The former included the Uí Meic Cairthind of Lough Foyle and the Uí Fiachrach of Ardstraw, while the latter comprised the Uí Thuirtri. North for these purposes is equivalent to north-west, as in *CGH* i.153, where Lower and Upper Lough Erne are taken as lying north to south; 'the mountain' refers to the Sperrins seen as being continued in the hills north of Omagh.

¹⁵⁵ *Rex nepotum Mc Uais*, AU 598.2; *ri Ua M-cuais*, AU 645.1; *rex nepotum filiorum Cuais Bregb*, AU 838.4; 839.5; cf. *CGH* i.139, 140, 147, 152.

¹⁵⁶ Segments of the latter had names in Uí + personal name: Uí Fiachrach, Uí Ailella, Uí Néill etc.

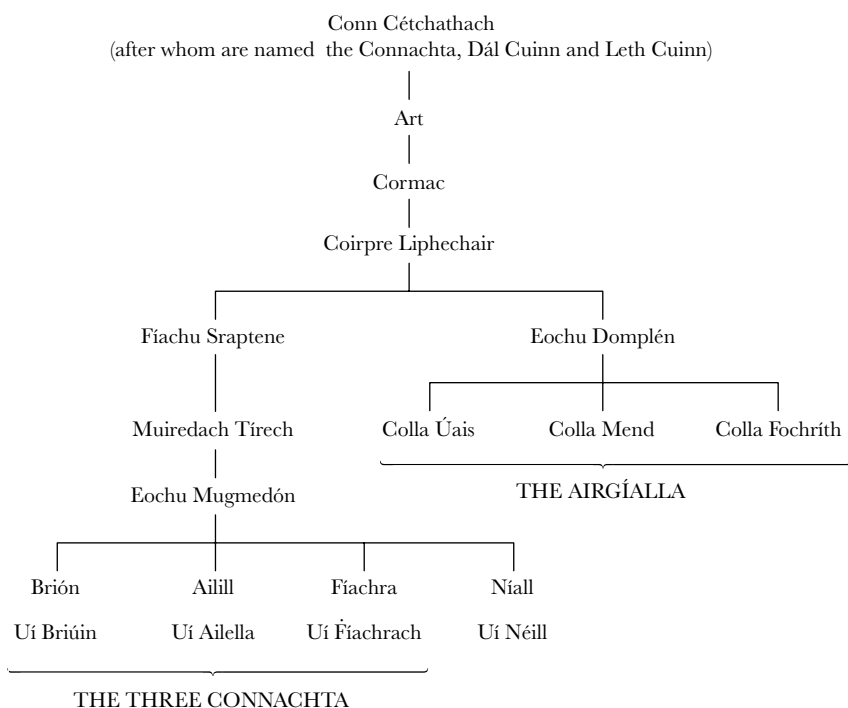
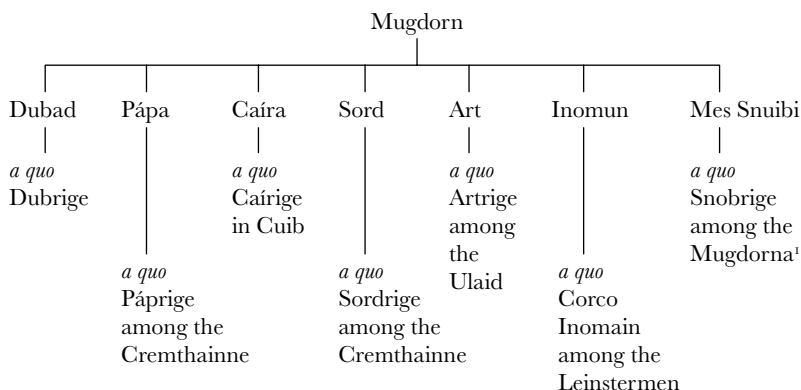


Fig. 12.3. The Airgíalla, the Connachta and the Uí Néill

Something of the complex web of relationships lying behind the scheme of ‘the Three Collas’ is revealed by the genealogies of the descendants of the third Colla, Colla Mend; he was supposed to be the ancestor of the Mugdorna of south Co. Armagh. In a text, probably of *c.* 800, two explanations are given of the sobriquet *Mend*.¹⁵⁷ The first, and obviously correct, one is that *mend* is the normal adjective meaning ‘stammering’, a defect which would tell against someone’s claim to the kingship.¹⁵⁸ It accords with the fact that while the Uí Maccu Úais and the Uí Chremthainn (supposedly descended from Colla Úais and Colla Fochríth respectively) both supplied kings of the Airgíalla, the Mugdorna did not.

The second explanation, although plainly incorrect in a literal sense,

¹⁵⁷ *CGH* i.152. The persons mentioned are both of the seventh century; the text has *Conla* at 142 b 33, but the association of *Mennat/Mennet* with *mend* may, if the latter had original *-nd-*, indicate *-nd- > -nn-*. ¹⁵⁸ *Scéla Muiáce Meic Dathó*, ed. Thurneysen, § 14; *EIWK* 106–7.



¹ Following the reading of *LL* and *Laud Misc.* 612.

Fig. 12.4. The Mugdorna

offers precious information about the political connections of the Mugdorna. The reason given is that Colla Mend or Menn was fostered by a couple, the woman called Mennet Chruithnech (either of the Cruithni or of the Picts) and the man called Mugdorn the Black of the Ulstermen. Given the connection of Mugdorn Dub with the Ulstermen, it is likely that Mennet was reckoned to belong to the Cruithni rather than to the Picts. In other words, Colla Mend's fosterers were of the two main peoples of the province of Ulster. We are then told that there was a *gens* named Dál Mennat among the Mugdorna to which Máel Bresal mac Máele Dúin belonged.¹⁵⁹ There were, however, several other *gentes* belonging to the Mugdorna. The seven sons of Mugdorn are detailed in fig. 12.4.

Cremthainne is another name for one branch in the the second group among the Airgíalla, the Uí Chremthainn; but Cuib is the plain called Mag Coba in the west of Co. Down, the ruling dynasty of which belonged to the Cruithni. In other words, the main connections of the supposed sons of Mugdorn encompassed both Airgíallan and Ulster territory.

The name Mugdorna may, however, have yet more to tell us. Adomnán provides an early form of the name, in Latin dress: Maudgorni or Maudgornei.¹⁶⁰ The name is a compound of *mug* 'slave'

¹⁵⁹ The father Máel Dúin died in 611 (AU), and his uncle Colmán Cú is named by Adomnán, *VSC* i. 43.

¹⁶⁰ Adomnán, *VSC* i. 43; Maudgornei is the form of the *B* MSS. This, combined with the acc. pl. form Mugdornu, *CGH* i. 152, and gen.pl. Mugdorne (AU 696.5; Mogdornæ, 611.2; Moghdairne, 750.10, Mughdhorne, 759.3), suggest that Maudgorne was a masc. *u*-stem. As a personal name, Mugdorn was a masc. *o*-stem.

and *dorn* 'fist', and its literal meaning is thus 'slave-fisted';¹⁶¹ it is consistent with the account cited above, according to which the ruling *gens* of the Mugdorna was Dál Mennat, distinct from Mugdorn Dub and his seven sons. The latter, as we have seen, had links both with the Airgíalla and with the Ulstermen. The same double association is found in the role of a slave-woman called Dorn in the 'Saga of Fergus mac Léti'.¹⁶² The plot concerns Conn Cétchathach, supposed ancestor of the Connachta and his brother Eochu Bélbuide. They fought for the kingship, Eochu Bélbuide relying on Ulster help; eventually he returned home from exile in Ulster under protection secured by the king of the Ulstermen, Fergus mac Léti; but, once home, he was killed by Asal son of Conn, the four sons of Buide son of Ainmuire and a son whom Dorn, daughter of Buide, had borne to an alien. This son, together with some land, was judged forfeit to Fergus mac Léti as a *cimbid*, 'captive', for the violation of his protection, but his mother went into slavery in her son's place. The slave-woman, Dorn, was subsequently killed by Fergus mac Léti and the land given him reverted to the heirs of Conn. The name of the land was Dispute 'on account of the number of disputes and contests there were about it subsequently'.¹⁶³ This story of someone called Dorn who went into slavery for a killing committed by Asal son of Conn and others may have nothing to do with the name Mugdorna, but the story could well be another explanation of the name.

The likely implications of these stories are, first, that the Mugdorna were not originally seen as descendants of Conn Cétchathach, and, secondly, that there was room for debate as to whether they belonged to the province of Ulster or the hegemony of the Uí Néill. The origin story of the Airgíalla, therefore, is evidently fictional, just as the role of the three Collas in the genealogies seems thoroughly artificial. It looks as though the fiction was relatively recent, given the incompatible material surviving in the main genealogical collections about the Airgíalla.¹⁶⁴ What we have in the case of the Airgíalla is, then, a reorganisation of their ancestral identity in order to affiliate them to Conn Cétchathach. The link was

¹⁶¹ J. Vendryes, continued by E. Bachellery and P.-Y. Lambert, *Lexique étymologique de l'irlandais ancien* (Dublin and Paris, 1959-), s.v. *mug*.

¹⁶² Ed. Binchy, *Ériu*, 33-48. The saga is probably of the eighth century, but a poem which has the essence of the story, *ibid.*, p. 46, may be seventh-century.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, § 3, but there may be a connection with the name of the River Dee in Co. Louth, which was Nith: Hogan, *Onom.* p. 555.

¹⁶⁴ Compare the way in which the Fir Rois, earlier part of the Mugdorna, were attached to the Airthir, in whose territory Armagh lay, and established an hereditary claim to the office of *sacerdos* at Armagh: Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, p. 118.

made in a way which would give them a privileged position in the polity built up by the Uí Néill in the northern half of Ireland. The date of this reinterpretation of history may be as late as the seventh century, given the ability of the Cruithni, and perhaps also the Ulstermen, to secure the kingship of Tara even in the 630s.

Part of the price of the incorporation of the Airgíalla into Dál Cuinn was the dilution of the links between the Uí Néill and the Connachta, lampooned in the origin story of the Airgíalla as ‘the Men of Unintoxicating Drinks’. The Connachta normally remained allies of the Uí Néill, as we shall see in the next chapter, but the alliance probably did not extend to regular military assistance.¹⁶⁵ The Airgíalla, however, as their origin-story was careful to stress, were an indispensable element in the military power of the Uí Néill. Moreover, the incorporation of the Airgíalla into Dál Cuinn, and the consequent change to their perception of their own identity, implied an enduring allegiance to the Uí Néill. Armchair scholars often look first and last for displays of brute force as evidence of political power. Yet the power of the Uí Néill may have rested more on origin-legends, however fictional, than on mere military capacity: in the case of the Airgíalla, the origin-legend justified delivering the military capacity.

(X) THE KINGSHIP OF TARA IN THE LAWS

The evidence of annals, king-lists and hagiography all tells against the sceptical view that the kingship of Tara was no more than another provincial kingship. Yet Binchy had good positive reasons for taking a sceptical line, and these need to be discussed. His argument arose out of what the lawtracts said about the status of kings. Essentially, they all divide kings into three ranks: the king of a single *túath*, who has no other king beneath him; the king who is the overlord of three, four or more other kings; and, finally, the king of a province, such as Leinster or Munster.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ AU 808.4 shows Muirgius mac Tomaltaig helping Conchobar mac Donnchada of Cland Cholmáin against the king of Tara, Áed Oirdnide, but this was an internal Uí Néill conflict and the intervention was wholly ineffective.

¹⁶⁶ See above, pp. 130–2. The names of the three ranks vary: common are, in descending order, *ollam rí*, *rí túath*, *rí túaithe*, ‘supreme king’, ‘king of peoples’, ‘king of a people’; e.g. *Bretha Déin Chécht*, ed. Binchy, p. 22, § 2. The *rí ruirech*, ‘king of great kings’, is sometimes the highest rank, sometimes the second of the three. The interpretation of the *ollam rí* as the king of a province finds its principal support from *Uraicecht Becc*, where the king of Munster is said to be *ollam úas rígaib*, ‘supreme above kings’, *CIH* 2282.12.

‘One thing at least is certain’, declared Binchy in 1970, ‘the king of Tara, the *Ardri* or “High King” of so many modern textbooks of Irish history is not mentioned in this context at all.’¹⁶⁷ He did not deny that there was such a thing as the kingship of Tara, merely that ‘the claim of the king of Tara to be “king of Ireland”, though it was put forward by Adamnán (who was himself a member of the dynastic kindred) . . . had no more basis in law than it had in fact.’ In other words, evidence for a supra-provincial kingship of Tara could be dismissed because it was partisan, while the laws, presumed to be impartial, regarded the king of a province such as Munster as the highest grade of king. It should be noticed, however, that Binchy qualified the absence of any mention of a king of Tara in the laws by using the phrase ‘in this context’, meaning thereby ‘in the law of status’. Elsewhere the kingship of Tara is indeed mentioned: we have noticed already the reference to Congal Cáech as king of Tara. In another lawtract Lóegaire mac Néill, king of Tara, is opposed to Patrick very much as he is in Muirchú’s Life of Patrick and in Tírechán’s *Collectanea*.¹⁶⁸ The same passage also gives precedence to Corc mac Luigdech, ancestor of the Éoganachta of Munster, by saying that he was the first to bow before Patrick, but it adds, ‘he was a hostage held by Lóegaire’. One could scarcely have a more emphatic declaration of the role attributed to Lóegaire as king of Tara and therefore of Ireland. The term *ardri*, ‘high-king’, is not of central importance, since it could be used of kings other than the king of Tara, but it is worth adding that there is good evidence that the term itself is an old one.¹⁶⁹

Even the claim that the kingship of Ireland went unrecognised in the tracts on status is open to question. In *Míadslechte* (a text of the eighth century), the top grade is given the old name *triath*.¹⁷⁰ He is described as ‘a burdensome *triath* who penetrates Ireland of peoples from sea to sea’. An example is also given, namely Conchobor, who is said to have ‘bound the lands of the men of Ireland’. The example poses a problem, for the usual doctrine was that at the time of Conchobar, unusually, there was no king of Ireland.¹⁷¹ Moreover the *triath* is described as ‘burdensome’

¹⁶⁷ Binchy, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship*, p. 32.

¹⁶⁸ *Córus Béscnai*, *CIH* 527.14–528.6 (but 528.1–4 is an intrusion).

¹⁶⁹ L. Breatnach, ‘Varia vi:3. *Ardri* as an Old Compound’, *Ériu*, 37 (1986), 192–3.

¹⁷⁰ Compare Welsh *trwyd* in the name of the king of boars, Twrch Trwyd, in the *Historia Brittonum*, c. 73, and later in *Culhwch and Olwen*, ed. R. Bromwich and D. Simon Evans (Cardiff, 1992), where note esp. lines 1074–6, in a half-Irish form, *Trwyth*; Breatnach, ‘*Ardri* as an Old Compound’, and *Sanas Cormaic* (*YBL*), ed. Meyer, nos. 1198 (quoting *Míadslechte*) and 1202 (I am indebted to Dr Paul Russell for these references).¹⁷¹ *CGH* i.22–23; *LL* i.90 (2887–8).

and it is said that 'he encompasses [i.e. goes outside] measurement so that [his due] is measured according to his fist'. All this suggests a critical attitude to mere military power, rather as Óengus the Culdee implied that the rule of Donnchad mac Domnaill was 'burdensome';¹⁷² it is even reminiscent of the 'bull-ruler' of *Audacht Morainn*, the *flaith* who 'strikes and is struck, wards off and is warded off, roots out and is rooted out', the ruler who both lives and dies by the sword.¹⁷³ The *triath*, then, is an ambiguous figure and it may be unwise to draw any firm conclusions on his relevance to the kingship of Tara.

A more general answer to the argument put by Binchy would, however, allow that it contains some truth. As we saw with Adomnán's contrast between the powers of Díarmait mac Cerbaill and Áed Sláne, the power of a king of Tara varied between 'the king of all Ireland' and the ruler of only one part of the *gens* of the Connachta (here including the Uí Néill). Merely by being king of Tara one did not exercise all the authority associated with that position. A king such as Áed Sláne perhaps exemplified Binchy's king of Tara who was no more than a provincial king. The absence of a regular rank of king of Ireland from the laws on status may thus recognise, first, the variability in the authority of the king of Tara, and, secondly, the consequent necessity of reckoning each king of Tara's status by his power, so that, in the words of *Míadslechta*, his due 'is measured by his fist'.

The nature of the Uí Néill hegemony was changing in the period from the sixth to the eighth century. In the sixth and early seventh century, the Uí Néill did not enjoy a monopoly of the kingship of Tara; but, because other dynasties competed against the Uí Néill for the same prize, it necessarily followed that the kingship of Tara was not merely an overkingship of the Uí Néill. At the same period, the Uí Néill remained one of the branches of the Connachta; admittedly, they were outstandingly successful, but there was still no doubt that an Uí Néill ruler was *moccu Chuinn*, a member of the *gens* that named itself after, and claimed descent from, Conn Cétchathach. The king of Tara at this period, if he was of the Uí Néill, was probably also king of the Connachta. In the seventh century, two major changes occurred. First, the Uí Néill became more and more detached from the Connachta, while also forging a new unity, under the umbrella of Dál Cuinn, with the Airgíalla. Secondly, the Uí Néill achieved a monopoly of the kingship of Tara that was to last until the late tenth century. But there was a less happy side to this achieve-

¹⁷² Above, pp. 169–70.

¹⁷³ *Audacht Morainn*, ed. Kelly, § 62.

ment: it could no longer be taken entirely for granted that the king of Tara was more than the king of the Uí Néill. Many of them were, but the weakest among them may effectively have been kings of Dál Cuinn in the new sense of the Uí Néill together with the Airgíalla.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The powers of kings

In the eighth century it becomes possible to analyse in some detail how Irish kingship worked. Three texts show, for example, what privileges client-kings hoped to gain from their overlords. Moreover, origin-legends help to put them in their proper context – to understand not just the claims themselves but the stories that justified them and placed them within the total narrative of the island of Ireland. One of these three texts we have met already, the poem on the Airgíalla to which the story of ‘The Three Collas’ provided the supporting narrative. The other two both come from Munster.¹ One, the West Munster Synod, is a half-royal, half-ecclesiastical narrative designed to justify a rebellion by a group of West Munster kingdoms, led by the Cíarraige Lúachra, against their immediate overlord, the king of West Munster, who was of the Éoganacht Locha Léin.² The other text is the *Frithfolad Muman*, ‘The Counter-Obligations of Munster’.³ Here, too, claims are made on behalf of client kingdoms, but in this instance the overking in question is the king of Munster with his royal seat at Cashel. The counter-obligations in question are owed by the king of Munster to his client-kingdoms in return for the obligations they have to him. In this text, therefore, there is no intention, as there was in the West Munster Synod, to deny or at least sharply reduce the power of the overlord. *Frithfolad Muman*’s strategy was to safeguard the privileges of client-kingdoms by presenting them as one side of a contract between overking and vassal-kings and kingdoms. His powers depended on their privileges and vice versa; each was the contractual ‘consideration’ for the other. The background to these texts is clarified by the origin-legends of Munster, notably by the story of ‘Conall Corc and the Corco Loigde’, a text written late in the

¹ They are both discussed by L. Ó Buachalla, ‘Contributions Towards the Political History of Munster’, 78–86. ² Ed. Meyer, ‘The Laud Genealogies and Tribal Histories’, 315–17.

³ *Dál Caladbuig*, ed. O’Keeffe, pp. 19–21.

seventh or early in the eighth century at the church of Cloyne in what is now the east of Co. Cork, and by 'The Story of the Finding of Cashel'; both are narrative justifications for the claims of an inner circle within the Éoganachta to rule Munster to the exclusion of others.⁴

There is no equivalent text to *Frithfolad Muman* or the poem on the Airgiálalla that advances the claims of overkings, such as the kings of Tara and Cashel, to service from their subjects. As a result it can appear as if the major Irish kings, the *prímríg*, 'chief kings', or *ardríg*, 'high kings', were virtual figureheads, as lacking in power as the last Merovingians, but without the excuse of any rival source of power such as the Arnulfing mayors of the palace. This may well be an optical illusion created by the chance distribution of surviving evidence. It is also reasonable to ask whether overkings against whose power client-kings needed to advance such arguments might not have been *rois fainéants* at all – 'priestly vegetables' as they have been ironically called – whose only refuge from steady drinking and taboo-laden inaction was the odd cattle-raid across the frontier.⁵ That the evidence is overwhelmingly of the protestations of client-kings may itself be indirect testimony to the extent of the power exercised by their overlords.

More fundamentally, the impression of weak kingship may derive from looking in the wrong places for evidence of strength. Historians may be happiest with centralised bureaucratic power that leaves good archival evidence, at least of orders given if not of orders obeyed. Early medieval Irish kings had their servants, but they certainly did not have bureaucracies as did many later medieval and early modern governments. In a bureaucratic polity there is a state apparatus distinct from civil society; there are thus powers exercised upon society by the organs of the state. Early Irish kings, by contrast, worked with the powers available within society at large. There was not a state, distinct from society, but rather a king who was central within society, whose power was effective partly because he deployed the same powers as did other lords, but to a higher degree. In such a polity, the same concepts were applied to lords as to kings, for example the language of contract; a king was conceived as a kind of lord; and the legitimacy of royal authority thus stood or fell with the authority of many other men. In such a polity, therefore,

⁴ 'Conall Corc and the Corco Luigde', ed. Meyer; 'The Story of the Finding of Cashel', ed. and tr. M. Dillon, *Ériu*, 16 (1952), 61–73.

⁵ P. Wormald, 'Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship: Some Further Thoughts', in P. Szarmach and V. Oggins (eds.), *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Culture*, Studies in Medieval Culture 20 (Kalamazoo, 1986), p. 153, characterising the views of D. A. Binchy.

the characteristic modern questions of the legitimacy of state power and of the liberty of the citizen did not arise.

Yet though fundamental conditions were different from those of late medieval and modern states, it may still be argued that early Irish society in its political aspect was highly articulated, in that men thought in terms of clearly defined rights and duties buttressed by an elaborate machinery of enforcement by sureties and gages.⁶ Neither the pattern of obligation nor the machinery of enforcement was created by kings; but they were open to kings to use for political purposes. The ways men thought about political relationships, the ways they articulated their relationships with one another, made it possible for kings to mobilise their peoples. We can see one way in which this might be done by analysing the *cánai*, 'edicts' or 'laws'. The surviving texts are ecclesiastical, but two at least were also royal, and the eighth-century annals demonstrate that this dual character was true of several others for which no text survives. *Cáin Adomnáin* shows how Adomnán, abbot of Iona, could mobilise Ireland, Dál Ríata and Pictland behind a scheme of protection for women, clerics and children. But this 'Law of the Innocents' as it was called – 'innocents' because those to be protected were non-combatants – could not have been enacted without the collaboration of Loingsech mac Óengussa, king of Tara, who, like Adomnán, was of Cenél Conaill. Indeed it could not have been enacted without the collaboration of many other kings as well. The strong point of the *cáin*, and the reason why it exemplifies so strikingly the way major enterprises could come to fruition, was that it was a contrivance which made it in the interest of most powers most of the time to enforce the edict. The surviving *cánai* show that an edict of this kind was enforced by recruiting the powers of client-kings, lords, churches and kindreds – in effect by recruiting society itself to enforce an edict upon itself. This mode of political power was available to kings and to leading churchmen enjoying close relations with kings. But although *cánai* show particularly well what kings could do and what means they could deploy, the attested examples were apparently exceptional measures; admittedly they were quite frequent, taking Ireland as a whole, in the second half of the eighth century and the opening years of the ninth, but they were still far from everyday occurrences in any particular kingdom. We may begin, therefore, with the more humdrum powers of kings, and, first of all, with the fiscal aspect of kingship.

⁶ Stacey, *The Road to Judgment*, esp. pp. 82–111.

(1) THE FISCAL RESOURCES OF KINGS

Any Irishman of standing aspired to *sochraite* and feared its opposite, *dochraite*. *Sochraite* was the happy condition of being accompanied and supported by many kinsmen and allies (*carait*). *Dochraite* was social isolation. Men hoped for *sochraite* in death as in life: laymen were normally buried in kindred cemeteries; monks, nuns and probably ecclesiastical tenants were buried in church cemeteries, preferably close to the patron saint of the church, the *érlam* or *patronus*. One reason why small local churches were best entrusted to a kindred was that the kindred was expected not only to provide a priest but also to secure his *sochraite*.⁷ The state of affairs men feared is well illustrated by a story in the Tripartite Life of Patrick. Patrick announced to a man of his company called Malach the Briton, who had displeased him by a lack of perfect faith in thaumaturgy: “Your foundation will not be exalted on earth; your house will be a house of one man.” His foundation is in the north-eastern corner of the Southern Déis, called Cell Malaich. It will be very difficult to feed five cows there till Doomsday.⁸

Kings were expected to surround themselves with more companions than could lesser men. One of the marks of the collapse of the *cáin* (here ‘coercive authority’) of the peerless but legendary king of Tara, Conaire Mór, was that he no longer proceeded from one welcoming house or fort to another but fled with his household from one set of enemies only to fall into the hands of another:

‘May I be permitted to say this, Conaire,’ said Mac Cécht son of Snaide Teched, battle-champion of Conaire son of Eterscéle, ‘the men of Ireland used more often to be competing to entertain you for the night than you were wandering around looking for a guest-house.’⁹

In the Munster edict, *Cáin Fúithirbe*, of c. 680, one of the offences threatened with penalty is *dochraite óenaig*, ‘[leaving the king] without friends at an *óenach*’.¹⁰ All freemen had rights to hospitality and the extent of those rights was governed by rank.¹¹ Kings could bring with them a larger company than even the highest noble. For example, the prescribed company of a man of royal kindred who is not the heir-apparent is nine men when he is on public business, seven when he is concerned only with

⁷ Contrast Brusca in Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 16.8–10, ‘All is fine for you since you have a son; as for me, my own death is loathsome to me because I am alone in a church in the back of beyond.’

⁸ *VT*² lines 2328–31. ⁹ *Togail Bruidne Dá Derga*, ed. Knott, § 27, lines 257–60.

¹⁰ Breatnach, ‘The Ecclesiastical Element in *Cáin Fúithirbe*’, 39 (line 7), tr. p. 40.

¹¹ *Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchy, Legal Glossary, s.v. *dám*; Kelly, *Guide to Early Irish Law*, pp. 139–40.

his private affairs.¹² For a minor king the figures rise to twelve and nine, for the king of an entire province to thirty and seventeen.¹³

Whatever Mac Cécht might say, entertaining a king was not only a serious undertaking, it was also an imposition which subjects were anxious to limit. There was, however, no question of attacking the principle that kings should receive such entertainment: all freemen had such rights, to varying degrees, and all lords, not just the king, had rights to larger companies when on public business, and thus the principle itself was inviolable.¹⁴ Nonetheless, there are clear signs that the limits were a matter of dispute. In principle, the king of a single *túath* might take a company of nine when on private business; but *Críth Gablach*, which gives this figure, also gives a less generous account not just of the privileges of the *rí túaithe* but also of his equals, the bishop and the leading scholar:

A king of a *túath* is entertained with twelve men on the affairs of the *túath*; the *túath* supports him by himself when on his private business. The company of a bishop concerned with the business of church and lay *túath* is also twelve; on his private business he goes about by himself. For a *túath* cannot support the company of a king and a bishop if they always batten upon it. The company of a leading scholar is also twelve men.¹⁵

The same cautious approach is also taken by the poem on the Airgíalla. It is concerned to limit the obligations that the king of the Uí Néill, namely the king of Tailtiu (and Tara), could inflict upon the Airgíalla: 'They [the kings of the Uí Néill] are entitled to entertainment when travelling the roads, except that the company of a king which extends to a hundred is not maintained.'¹⁶ Not even the king of Tara was entitled to be entertained with as large a company as he might desire.¹⁷

The seriousness even of accepted levels of hospitality is well shown by what *Críth Gablach* has to say about compulsory requisition of goods (purveyance). In the view of this text it was a matter of honour that a lord should meet his obligations without resorting to such requisition (*errach*, *aurrach*). There were, however, exceptions for a king:

¹² *Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchy, § 28, lines 427–8; for the *aire forgail*'s probably royal blood, see Charles-Edwards, 'Críth Gablach and the Law of Status', 61–2.

¹³ *Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchy, § 31, lines 454–5, § 33, lines 478–9.

¹⁴ The enhanced right of the *aire désa* when on public business can be seen by comparing *Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchy, line 349 with *ibid.*, line 379. ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, § 47, lines 598–603.

¹⁶ 'A Poem on the Airgíalla', ed. O Daly, stanza 19.

¹⁷ One of the main themes of the ninth-century text *Scéla Cano meic Gartnáin*, is the embarrassment of a series of royal hosts confronted with the duty of entertaining a princely exile, Cano mac Gartnáin; the last host, Illand mac Scandláin, king of Corco Loígde, was generous even by the most stringent of standards but was killed shortly afterwards by rebels from within his kingdom. The implication may be that the burdens he imposed on his people played a part in causing the rebellion.

There are, moreover, three compulsory requisitions which do not render a king liable: a requisition when he is harrying them on a people that evades [a subject *tiath*'s obligations to] him; a requisition when a king from outside is in his company in his *tiath* if he cannot reach his forts; a requisition of dry stock in an uninhabited district after he has come across the frontier. He pays compensation for the last two requisitions to everyone who owns the livestock; he does not pay compensation for the first unless it be an unlawful invasion.¹⁸

The second item in this triad is particularly interesting. Typically the 'king from outside' will have been an overking entitled to be entertained by his client-king.¹⁹ Literary texts take such practices for granted, even though they may exaggerate their extent. For example, Cano mac Gartnáin, a Dál Riatan prince and the hero of *Scéla Cano meic Gartnáin*, came to Ireland in flight during the reign of Diarmait and Blathmac, sons of Áed Sláne, as joint kings of Tara. He met them when they were in Collmag in the province of Ulster 'on their consumptions', that is when they were consuming the hospitality of their client-kingdoms.²⁰ The sixth-century king of Tara, Diarmait mac Cerbaill, was said to have been killed by Áed the Black when staying at Ráith Becc in Mag Line, the leading Cruithnian kingdom.²¹ The monks of Clonmacnois later claimed that, while Diarmait's body was buried at Connor, just to the north of Mag Line, his head was brought back and buried in their cemetery.²² The suggestion behind this story was that Diarmait was killed treacherously by Áed the Black, and therefore that he was a guest in Ráith Becc, just as *Críth Gablach* implies that a client-king would conduct an overking from *dún* to *dún*.

The royal fort, *dún rí*, was central to the business of being a king. Several are well attested, such as Dún Cúair, now Rathcore, Co. Meath,²³ used by Áed Oirdnide in 804 for a synod and in 805 as an advanced post for an invasion of Leinster.²⁴ In *Críth Gablach* the king's *dún* is where he is expected to make himself accessible to his people. Kings

¹⁸ *Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchy, § 44, lines 559–65.

¹⁹ An hagiographical example is of the king of the Loígsi entertaining the king of Leinster, *Vita I.S. Lugidi*, c. 50 (ed. Heist, *Vitae*, p. 142). ²⁰ *Scéla Cano meic Gartnáin*, ed. Binchy, lines 38–40.

²¹ AT and CS = 565; cf. Adomnán, *VSC* i.36, which shows that Áed was already regarded as Diarmait's killer at the end of the seventh century; AU only says that Diarmait was killed, not who killed him or where; much of what is in the Clonmacnois group (AT and CS) annal for 565 is likely to be of tenth-century date, but the place and identity of the killer may well have been in the Chronicle of Ireland and in its source, the Iona annals.

²² Ibid.; the point of this claim, which I owe to Dr Elizabeth O'Brien, is given by *Hib.* xlix.10: 'Ubi enim caput fuerit, illic omnia membra congregabuntur', 'For where the head has been placed, there all the limbs will be brought together' ('the place of resurrection' would not necessarily be the original place of burial but would be the final resting-place of the head). Cf. *Vita S. Fintani de Cluain Edmehc*, c. 15 (ed. Heist, *Vitae*, pp. 149–50). ²³ N 76 45. ²⁴ AU 804.7; 805.7.

might be known by their forts, as the king of southern Brega was the king of Loch nGabor (a crannóg).²⁵ A fort might be identified with a dynasty, as was Ráith Imgáin (Rathangan, Co. Kildare) with the kings of the Uí Fáilgi in a well-known poem, which also provides an early regnal list.²⁶ At a more humdrum level, a man finding a stray horse should declare his find at the smith's forge, at the chief church of the *túath*, the *dún* of the judge of the *túath* and the nearest *tigernae's dún*, *tigernae* standing perhaps for the king of the *túath*.²⁷ The *dún*, of the king pre-eminently but also of others such as the judge, was the centre of public life – of life *i túaith* 'among a people' as opposed to life *fo leith*, 'aside', 'in private'. It also seems to have been central to military operations, not because the usual campaign was a matter of sieges – it was not – but because the *dún* was a link in supply lines. We have already seen that Dún Cúair was used as a base by Áed Oirdnide for an attack on Leinster, and map 12 shows why this was so. If the Uí Néill brought an army across the territories of the Airgíalla, they were expected to travel by their proper fortifications, *dúnada*; *dúnad* was sometimes used for the assembling of an army in and around a *dún*, as Áed Oirdnide assembled his army around Dún Cúair near the boundary of Leinster, and also perhaps for a royal visit to a *dún* while on circuit.²⁸

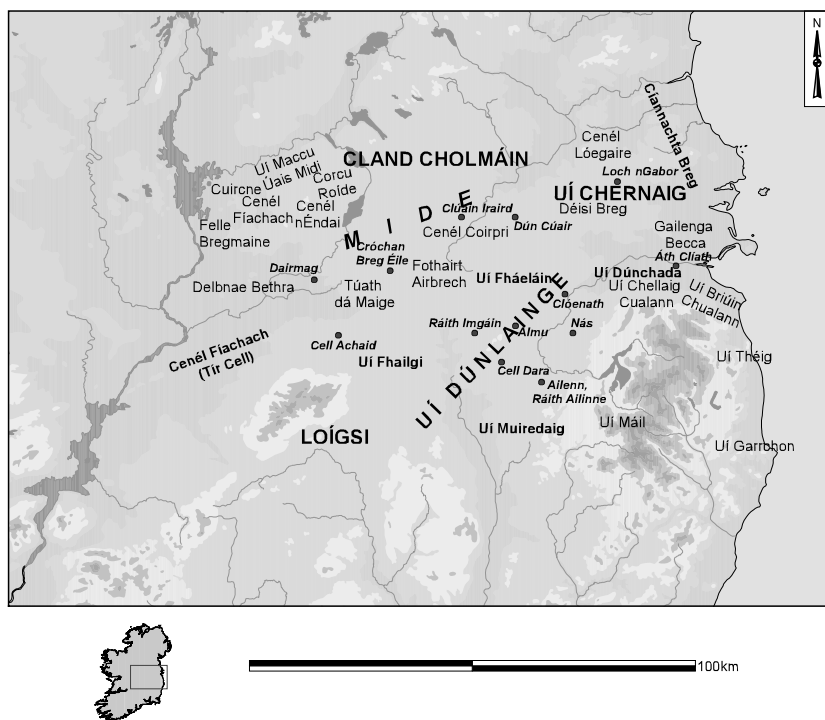
The central position of the king's *dún* explains the significance of an overking's circuit. In many cases, at least, a king even of a single *túath* would have had more than one *dún* even though his territory was often no more five to ten miles across. Mag Line, the valley of the Six Mile Water running down to Antrim Town, had at least two, Ráith Mór and Ráith Becc. These *dúne* facilitated the king's movement even around a small kingdom, making him more accessible and making it easier, perhaps, to collect food-renders. When, however, the overking was entertained in a client-king's *dún*, the latter became a place where the client-king's food-renders fed the overking's company, a centre where the overking could form connections with this client's nobles. To be accessible was to gain power: to be accessible at someone else's expense was to

²⁵ Ibid., 786.6; 805.6. Cf. also Dún Geimin, Glenn Geimin, Ciannacht Glinne Geimin (Dungiven, Glengiven, the Ciannacht of Glengiven): *Fél.*² Notes, 8 January, 8 December, AU 616, 695, 757, 884.

²⁶ CGH 1.58; G. Murphy, *Early Irish Lyrics* (Oxford, 1956), p. xvi: 'The fort over against the oakwood, / it was Bruidge's, it was Cathal's, / it was Áed's, it was Ailill's, it was Conaing's, / it was Cúilíne's, / and it was Máel Dúin's. / The fort endures after each king in turn / and the royal hosts sleep in the earth.' Bruidge died in 579, Áed in 604, Cúilíne (Cúléne) in 652 (dates in AU or AT); A. P. Smyth, 'Húi Fáilgi Relations with the Húi Néill', *Études Celtiques*, 14 (1974–5), 508–12.

²⁷ CIH 577. 33–4.

²⁸ AU 805.7. For the *dún* and the circuit see *ibid.*, 730.7.



A natural though not inevitable corollary of the mobility of the over-king was that some roads were maintained by royal power: the kings of the Uí Néill were entitled to entertainment 'when travelling the roads'.²⁹ The obligation to build and maintain roads was imposed on the subjects of the provincial king: a story in Cogitosus' *Life of Brigit* shows how the king of Leinster could impose road-building upon client kingdoms; how the work was divided between the client-kingdoms and then between kindreds within each kingdom; and how a weak people, such as Brigit's

²⁹ 'Poem on the Airgíalla', ed. O Daly, st. 19.

Fothairt, might be compelled to work on a particularly difficult stretch.³⁰ A passage from a text on relations between neighbours suggests that the obligation to do road-building work was partly directed towards facilitating the meeting of the major assembly and fair, the *óenach*, and also the movement of lords at 'the coshering season' when they were entertained by their clients.³¹

(II) FREE PEOPLES AND 'BASE-CLIENT PEOPLES'

The limits which the more powerful client-kings sought to buttress against further penetration by their overlord into their kingdoms are, as we have seen, one of the best-attested aspects of kingship. But these stronger client-kings had less powerful neighbouring rulers whose subjection to their overking was noticeably more onerous. The clientship of kings took, for the Irish, two principal forms, *cáin* and *cairde*.³²

Cairde, 'alliance', 'kinship', was the mode of overkingship appropriate for 'free peoples', *sóerthúatha*, whose subjection to their overlord was relatively honourable and light. What such free peoples owed and did not owe is best exemplified by the Poem on the Airgíalla and by the *Frithfolad* text. There are also other briefer assertions of 'free client' status, the relatively privileged subjection of a people perceived as analogous to the relatively privileged subjection of a 'free client'.³³ The principal obligations not owed by a free people but owed by an *aithechthúath*, literally 'base-client people', were the payment of food-renders and the granting to the overlord of a share in the judicial fines otherwise owed to the local king. Although the king of a *sóerthúath* had to entertain his overking, in his case the flow of economic resources at least went *via* the local king to the overlord; moreover it constituted an honourable relationship governed by the moral economy of gift and counter-gift. With an *aithechthúath* the relationship was less favourable, since the overlord could demand food-renders and these came to him directly, not via the local king, and as obligation rather than as gift.

It may be noted in passing that this variation in the economy of subjection was also visible, as we have seen, in the ecclesiastical sphere. Tírechán was anxious to offer 'free-church' status, in other words a

³⁰ Cogitosus, *Vita S. Brigitae*, tr. Connolly and Picard, c. 30.

³¹ *CIH* 580.6–8; cf. Text 4 in Kelly, *Early Irish Farming*, pp. 534–5, §§ 2–3.

³² Stacey, *The Road to Judgment*, pp. 82–111.

³³ *CGH* i.94 (127 b 19, 43–44), 207 (149 b 27–9, 36, probably eleventh century); 'The Expulsion of the Déssi', ed. Meyer, § 18.

subjection to the heir of Patrick which involved entertainment rather than food-render. Indeed Tírechán's evidence is the first closely datable evidence that the language of free and base clientship was interchangeable with that describing subordination across the boundaries of a *túath*. This way of perceiving political relationships can, therefore, be attested from the late seventh century to the ninth and beyond.

Two varieties in this opposition between political freedom and subjection may be distinguished. In the one case, the freedom or otherwise was that of an intermediate overking, one who had client-kings of his own but was himself subject to an overlord. If he was free in relation to his overlord, his obligations were limited, but, in addition, the obligations of his client-kings were primarily to him and not to his overlord. This situation is well illustrated by the genealogical tract on the Loígsi, in which it was claimed that the overking of the Loígsi, namely the king of the Loígse Réta, had in the past received the principal royal dues of 'the seven Loígsi'; the Loígse Réta, on the other hand, owed nothing to the king of Leinster beyond limited military service and provision of food in time of war.³⁴ The ambition of the king of the Loígse Réta, therefore, was to ensure that as much as possible of the flow of renders and services upwards, from the minor kingdoms to the king of Leinster, remained in his hands rather than going onwards to the king of Leinster, or, even worse, bypassing him entirely and going straight to the king of Leinster.

The other case is at the level of the minor kingdom. An excellent example of an *aithechthúath* is the people whose ruling group was called Dál Caladbuig, known from a short text in a single manuscript, unfortunately not complete.³⁵ The overlords of Dál Caladbuig were Cenél Fergusa Scandail, 'the Kindred of Fergus Scandal', a branch of the Éoganacht Airthir Chlíach, one of the ruling kindreds of Munster. At the date of this text (probably the eighth century), the seat of their king was at Dún nEochaille, 'the Fort of the Yew Wood', now Donohill about four miles north of the town of Tipperary.³⁶ Dál Caladbuig were placed by the text among the Múscraige mBreogain, who were settled around Tipperary town and in the Glen of Aherlow. If their overlords were settled around Donohill, Dál Caladbuig may have been situated close to Tipperary town and thus about four miles south of Donohill.

³⁴ *CGH* i. 93–4.

³⁵ *Dál Caladbuig*, ed. O'Keeffe, pp. 19–21 (§§ 1–7 constitute the text on the Dál Caladbuig); on this text see D. Ó Corráin, 'Dál Calathbuig', *Éigse*, 14 (1971–2), 13–16.

³⁶ At grid ref. R 90 43; *Dál Caladbuig*, § 2.



Map 13. Munster peoples and kingdoms

The Tripartite Life – in a section of the text reflected by the *Notulae* and therefore no later than c. 800 – mentions their neighbours, the Araid Clíach around Cullen, about six miles west-south-west of Donohill, and a branch of the Éoganachta, Uí Chathbad, who were also close to Cullen. This part of east Co. Limerick and west Co. Tipperary was a jigsaw of small peoples and kingdoms, among them several branches of the Éoganachta. The legends of the Éoganachta made Cashel, to the east, a relatively late acquisition in their prehistory;³⁷ much older was their domination of Clíu, the area on the north side of the Galty Mountains, the Crotta Clíach, ‘Harps of Clíu’, and stretching approximately from Dún nEochaille (Donohill) west probably as far as the River

³⁷ This was the implication of ‘The Story of the Finding of Cashel’, ed. Dillon.

Maigue, south of Limerick City.³⁸ The kindred of Fergus Scandal was named after a sixth-century king of Munster, but it never again rose to such an eminence.³⁹ The Patrick of c. 800 did not bother to visit them and their pedigree terminates in the middle of the eighth century.⁴⁰ The text on Dál Caladbuig may tentatively be dated to the early eighth century.

The obligations of Dál Caladbuig fall under two headings. First mentioned is the requirement to supply a wright to make the king's house in Dún nEochaille, together with the associated farm buildings, an out-house, ox-byre and kiln for drying grain. If Dál Caladbuig were unable to find someone from among their number who had the required skill, they had to find him from elsewhere, feed him and pay for his work. Secondly, they paid a food-render, thirty cows and the associated renders every second winter. The text adds, 'If he obtains kingship, it is every third year.' The meaning appears to be that if the ruler of Cenél Fergusa Scandail succeeds to the kingship of Munster as a whole, their obligations to him are reduced.

None of this is surprising: both the obligations and the language in which they are expressed are those of ordinary base clientship, the clientship of an *aithech*; the dues therefore were those owed by an *aithechthúath*. The unexpected touch comes in the next sentence, talking still of the food-renders: 'They consume it with him.' These may be the obligations of base clients; yet, having delivered the food and drink that they owed into the king's possession at Dún nEochaille, they then ate it in his company. Moreover, they appear to have consumed this meal in the royal house that their 'man of skill' had helped to build. What is remarkable, then, is the way the obligation to provide a wright and the obligation to provide food end up in a meal made from their own food in the house made by their own wright. Admittedly the meal displayed their lowly position as an *aithechthúath*; when they reached the royal house, they would have found their hostages already in residence, the means and also the emblems of their subjection. Yet the meal also showed that their ruler and his company remained the table-companions of a king of the Éoganachta; and, though they may have had to

³⁸ *Lebor na Huidre*, ed. R. I. Best and O. Bergin (Dublin, 1929), 10968, makes the R. Samair the boundary of Cliu, dividing the Araid Chliach from the Uí Fídgennnt. The Samair is identified by Hogan, *Onom.*, with the R. Morningstar, a tributary of the Maigue. The Morningstar is just to the west of Cnoc Áine and runs by Bruff (R 62 36).

³⁹ Fergus Scandal died c. 584 (*CS* 583 = 584).

⁴⁰ *CGH* i.209 (150 a 15ff.). They may have survived as the Éoganacht Becc, 'the Little Éoganacht': AI 1309.2.

travel no more than four miles to eat this meal, the Éoganachta were the branches of a great tree of kinship that overshadowed all Munster. By eating and drinking even a small *aithechthúath* might be attached to the rulers of a whole province.

Dál Caladbuig's main territory was among the Múscraige mBreogain. They had, however, outlying lands among the Corco Mo Drúad of north-west Co. Clare and among the Uí Glainíne. These owed a separate food-render, still to Cenél Fergusa Scandail, of six cows and their accompaniment (the equivalent of the food-render paid by six substantial commoners to the immediate lord). The lands of a given people, even of an *aithechthúath*, were not necessarily in one block. Such was notoriously the case of St Brigit's people, the Fothairt.⁴¹

(III) *FRITHFOLAD MUMAN*

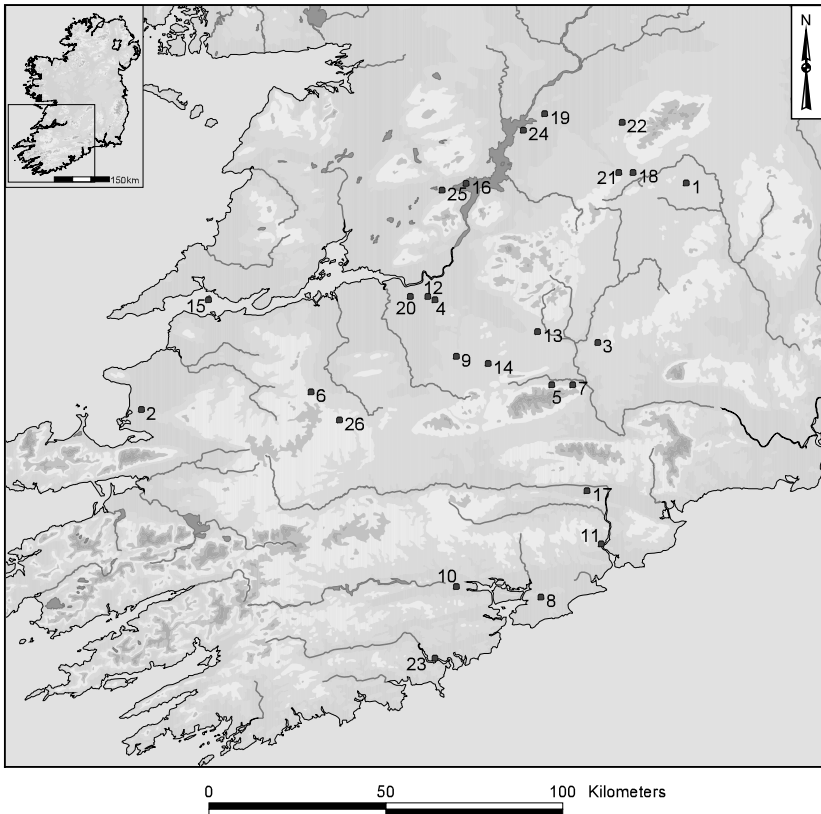
Dál Caladbuig was a minor *aithechthúath* subject to a local overlord. The political roles of several grander peoples of Munster are displayed in the text that immediately follows the account of Dál Caladbuig in the Yellow Book of Lecan: *Frithfolad Muman*, 'The Counter-Obligations of Munster'.⁴² *Frithfolad* means the obligations that one side to a contract has by virtue of the obligations owed by the other. The text thus presupposes a contractual conception of Irish overkingship. The date of the text cannot be fixed precisely, but its standpoint is consistent with political developments in the mid-eighth century.⁴³ Like the king-list in the Laud Synchronisms it assumes that the kingship of Munster will alternate among the Éoganacht Chaisil, the Éoganacht Glendamnach and the Éoganacht Áine, that is to say, the Éoganachta of Co. Tipperary (around Cashel); of northern Co. Cork (around Glanworth); and of east Co. Limerick (around Emly).⁴⁴ Excluded were the Éoganacht Raithlind (around Kinsale, Co. Cork); the Éoganacht Locha Léin (around

⁴¹ Cf. the various branches of the Fothairt mentioned in *CGH* i.82–3, among them the Fothairt Airbrech on the east side of Brí hÉile, Croghan Hill, Co. Offaly, the Fothairt Maige Ítha in south-eastern Leinster, the Fothairt Fea in central Leinster, the Fothairt Imchlár by Armagh and the Fothairt Airthir Liphi in the eastern part of the Liffey plain.

⁴² *Dál Caladbuig*, ed. O'Keeffe, §§ 8–18.

⁴³ P. Irwin, 'Aspects of Dynastic Kingship in Early Medieval Ireland', unpublished Oxford D.Phil. thesis, 1997, fols. 98–101, argues for a date between 738 and 757.

⁴⁴ 'Laud Synchronisms', ed. Meyer, 478–9. The main Munster king-list in this text begins with five names that are a pedigree of the Éoganacht Glendamnach; it was, therefore, presumably composed in their interest. The text was dated to the middle of the eighth century by J. Mac Neill, 'On the Reconstruction and Date of the Laud Synchronisms', *ZCP*, 10 (1915), 81–96.



- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Achad Bó / Aghaboe | 14. Imlech nIbair / Emlý |
| 2. Ard Fertae / Ardfert | 15. Inis Cathaig / Scatterry Island |
| 3. Caisel / Cashel | 16. Inis Celtra / Inishcaltra, Holy Island |
| 4. Carn Feradaig / Cahernarry | 17. Les Mór / Lismore |
| 5. Cell Beridcheirt / St Berrihert's Kyle | 18. Loch Cré / Monaincha |
| 6. (earlier Clúain Ard) Cell Íte / Killeedy | 19. Lothra / Lorrha |
| 7. Clúain Ard Mo Béccóc / St Peakaun's | 20. Mungairit / Mungret |
| 8. Clúain Uama / Cloyne | 21. Ross Cré / Roscrea |
| 9. Cnoc Áine / Knockainy | 22. Saiger / Seirkieran |
| 10. Corcach Mór / Cork | 23. Tech Saxan / Tysaxan |
| 11. Dairinis / Molana | 24. Tír dá Glas / Terryglas |
| 12. Domnach Maige Áinne / Donaghmore | 25. Túaimm Gréne / Tuamgraney |
| 13. Dún nEochaille / Donohill | 26. Tulach Léis na Saxan / Tullylease |

Map 14. Sites in Munster

Killarney, Co. Kerry); and the Uí Fhídgente (immediately to the south and south-west of Limerick City).⁴⁵

The division between the included and the excluded is geographical; but by the eighth century, at least, it was also genealogical. The inner circle of the Éoganachta may be defined geographically as those in a ring around the Galty Mountains: Cashel to the north-east, Clíu to the north-west and Glanworth to the south. Those excluded lay beyond this inner circle. The alliance between these three dynasties also had a genealogical dimension: they were the Éoganachta descended from Nad Froích son of Conall Corc, whereas the Éoganacht Raithlind traced their pedigree from Nad Froích's brother Macc Cass, and the Éoganacht Locha Léin traced theirs from a third brother, Coirpre.⁴⁶

This coincidence of geography, politics and genealogy raises the suspicion that the political alliance created the genealogy. If this were so, the genealogists' picture of the Éoganachta might be a relatively late construction, a justification of the exclusion of branches of the Éoganachta deemed more remote kin than the three members of the inner circle. The suspicion appears, however, to be untrue. First, it has been argued persuasively that the Cenél nAngsae said in 'Conall Corc and the Corco Luigde' to have come to Cashel 'only recently' were the Uí Éndai or Éoganacht Áine.⁴⁷ The implication of these words is that the Éoganacht Áine had a political standing inferior to that of Éoganacht Glendamnach and Éoganacht Chaisil. The basis of the argument was genealogical rather than geographical. The most inclusive view allowed all the descendants of Corc to be Éoganachta; the middle view allowed the title to the descendants of Corc's son Nad Froích;⁴⁸ the most exclusive view, that of 'Conall Corc and the Corco Luigde', allowed the title and status only to the descendants of Nad Froích's son, Óengus, excluding the Éoganacht Áine (alias Uí Éndai or Cenél nAngsae) who were descended from his other son, Ailill (fig. 13.1).

⁴⁵ A very similar line is taken by 'Conall Corc and the Corco Luigde', ed. Meyer; although it appears to have been written at Cloyne (within the kingdom of the Uí Liatháin), it supports the claims of the descendants of Nad Froích, namely Éoganacht Chaisil, Éoganacht Glendamnach and Éoganacht Áine (p. 62, lines 8–11: 'Coirpre mac Crimthann, ancestor of Éoganacht Glendamnach, gave Cloyne to God and to Colmán mac Lénine'). The link between Cloyne and the Éoganacht Glendamnach revealed in this passage suggests that the Laud Synchronisms (compiled in the interests of the Éoganacht Glendamnach) may have been a product of the same monastery.

⁴⁶ *CGH* i.195–7. ⁴⁷ Byrne, 'Dercu: The Feminine of *Mocu*', pp. 46–9.

⁴⁸ This is implied by Tirechán, *Collectanea*, 51.4, where Patrick baptises the sons of Nad Froích. In the Tripartite Life, however, this had been adapted to give a clear preference to the descendants of Óengus yet without excluding those of Ailill (Éoganacht Áine): *VT*² 2286–309.

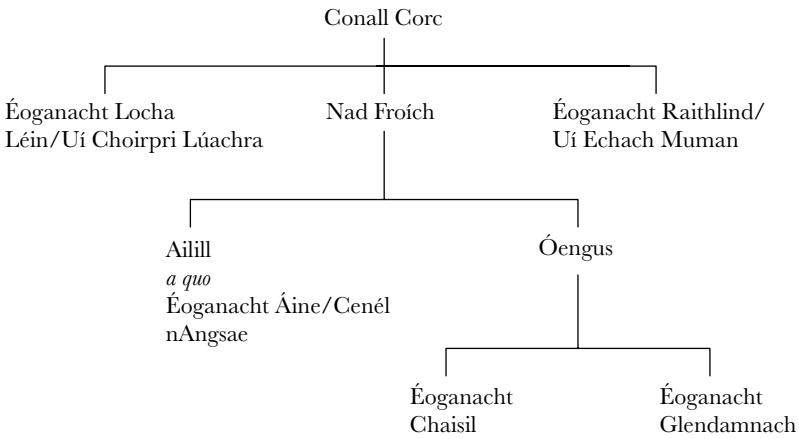


Fig. 13.1. The principal Éoganachta

As the political stance shifted from inclusive to exclusive, so more branches were denied the title of Éoganacht.

Secondly, a complex poem attributed to Luccreth moccu Chíara (who from his name must be a member of the *gens* of the Ciarraige) contains a series of pedigrees for the Éoganachta.⁴⁹ It gives pride of place to the pedigree of Cú cen Máthair, king of Munster, who died in 665. He was of the Éoganacht Glendamnach, that is to say, of the southern member of the inner circle around the Galty Mountains. His line alone was taken back beyond Nad Froích, ancestor of the inner circle, beyond Éogan Már after whom they were called Éoganachta, into the remote recesses of prehistory. After Cú cen Máthair of the Éoganacht Glendamnach come six other pedigrees:

- I. Cú cen Máthair: Éoganacht Glendamnach. *Ob.* 665, king of Munster.
- II. Áed Bennán: Éoganacht Locha Léin. *Ob.* 619, king of Munster.
- III. Dúngal Raithlind: Éoganacht Raithlind. *Fl.* c. 670.

⁴⁹ CGH i.199–204 (the title *D'Eoganacht Glennamnach* on p. 204 is wrong: the reading *Gabra* given by the Books of Lecan and Ballymote is correct). According to Meyer, *Über die älteste irische Dichtung*, 1, pp. 52–3, this poem is a late imitation of the corresponding Leinster poems, CGH i.1–7. For historical reasons this seems to me unlikely: the latest person for whom a genealogy is given was flourishing c. 720. M. Dillon, 'A Poem on the Kings of the Éoganachta', *Celtica*, 10 (1973), 9–14, at 13, rejects Meyer's argument. The ascription to Luccreth moccu Chíara must, however, be incorrect if he was, as Carney maintains ('Three Old Irish Accentual Poems', 74), a figure of the second half of the sixth century.

- IV. Fáelgus mac Nad Froích: Éoganacht Chaisil. *Fl.* c. 720.
- V. Amolngaid mac Éndai: Éoganacht Áine. *Fl.* c. 600, king of Munster.
- VI. Óengus Crobderg: Uí Chonaill Gabra branch of Uí Fídgenti. *Ob.* 636.
- VII. Éogan mac Crundmail: Uí Choirpri branch of Uí Fídgenti. *Ob.* 667.

This text grants no precedence to the inner circle. Apart from the Éoganacht Glendamnach, with which it begins, the other two are iv and v. To judge by i, ii and perhaps v, pedigrees were given for someone of the relevant lineage who was of particular political distinction, but this explanation does not work in all seven cases.

The poem is not without its historical problems. These centre on iv, and, in particular, on the insignificance, so far as we know, of Fáelgus mac Nad Froích in his own generation, whereas his descendants came to dominate not just Éoganacht Chaisil but all Munster from the middle of the ninth century until the rise of Dál Cais in the middle of the tenth.⁵⁰ Fáelgus' son, Donngal, was the eponymous ancestor of the branch of the dynasty to which these later rulers of Éoganacht Chaisil and Munster belonged, Clann Donngaile.⁵¹ The suggestion, then, is that no. iv was tampered with no earlier than the middle of the ninth century. What one would have expected from the character of the rest of the text would have been a pedigree either of Colcu mac Fáilbi Flaind (*ob.* 678) or of Móenach mac Fingin (*ob.* 662), both of whom were kings of Munster. Yet even if we allow for tampering, the problem has only been displaced. Let us suppose a later ninth-century genealogist in the pay of Clann Donngaile. Why should he choose Fáelgus mac Nad Froích to represent Éoganacht Chaisil when he could have chosen his more distinguished grandfather, Colcu mac Fáilbi Flaind, and still have promoted the genealogical prestige of Clann Donngaile? In other words, the difficulty – namely that Fáelgus mac Nad Froích looks too undistinguished for the genealogical company he is keeping in the poem – is no less awkward on the tampering theory than it was at the start.

There are two things that seem wrong about Fáelgus mac Nad Froích – that he was too undistinguished and that he was too late. His floruit lies in the first half of the eighth century, whereas all the other rulers for whom the poem provided pedigrees belonged to the seventh. A tentative answer to these two problems is that the poem belongs to the time of Cú

⁵⁰ Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, p. 179.

⁵¹ CGH i.216 (150 b 19), 252 (154 c 14).

cen Máthair's grandson, also king of Munster, Cathal mac Finguini (*ob.* 742), at a period when he was not attempting to advance the interests of the inner circle – Éoganacht Glendamnach, Éoganacht Áine and Éoganacht Chaisil – but rather, at least in part, to deflate the claims of Éoganacht Chaisil. The date would explain why Fáelgus could be included; the purpose would explain why the poet wanted to include him. The whole point was precisely his insignificance. By contrast, Cathal mac Finguini was not only king of Munster himself but could advertise the fact that his grandfather had also been king of Munster.

The basis of the poem's ordering is partly indicated by the guarantor list of *Cáin Adomnáin*.⁵² Although the titles in the list were added after 697, the addition may well have been no later than the renewal of the law in 727.⁵³ The Munster section of the list was headed by Eterscél mac Maíle hUmai, shortly to be king of Munster, of the Éoganacht Áine. Second, as in the poem, was the representative of the Éoganacht Locha Léin, Cú Dínaisc mac Cellaig, entitled king of Íarmumu, West Munster. Third came Éoganán mac Crundmaíl, king of the Uí Fídgenti; and fourth was Élodach mac Dúnlainge of Éoganacht Raithlind, king of Dessmumu, South Munster. The first kings in the two lists may be set side by side for comparison (see table 13.1). In the poem, the king of Munster was Cú cen Máthair of Éoganacht Glendamnach; in the guarantor list it was Eterscél mac Maíle hUmai of Éoganacht Áine. Both were of the inner circle. Yet this does not imply that only the inner circle could provide kings of Munster. The poem began its pedigree of Éoganacht Locha Léin from Áed Bennán on the basis, apparently, that he was the last of that line before the date of the poem's composition to have been king of Munster. The political settlement assumed by *Cáin Adomnáin* in 697 is important not just because it is precisely dated but because it is unlikely to have been determined by dynastic rivalries within the province: the community of Columba had no strong horses to back in the south. The degree of agreement between its order of precedence and that of the poem is thus a valuable pointer to a political pattern determined by the balance of power in the late seventh and early eighth centuries. Since Cashel itself, the royal seat of all Munster, lay in Aurmumu, East Munster, its precedence was set off against two leading vassal kings, of West Munster and of South Munster. Unlike the inner circle of the late eighth century, this earlier pattern sought to incorporate the leading

⁵² The following is based on Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Guarantor List of *Cáin Adomnáin*'.

⁵³ AU 727.

Table 13.1. *Regional kings in Munster*

The poem	The list in <i>Cáin Adomnáin</i>
I. King of Munster	I. King of Munster
II. King of West Munster	II. King of West Munster
III. King of South Munster	III. King of the Uí Fídgenti
	IV. King of South Munster

powers in the geographical periphery of Munster. They were assigned a high position as kings of West and South Munster and clear acknowledgement was made of their right to provide kings of all Munster, such as Áed Bennán.⁵⁴

The assumptions of *Frithfolad Muman* were different. First, the dynasties of the inner circle – Éoganacht Chaisil, Éoganacht Glendamnach and Éoganacht Áine – were not mentioned since the text was concerned with client-peoples, not with their rulers. The most honoured client-peoples were those Éoganachta outside the inner circle, the Uí Fídgenti, Raithlend and Íarlúachair (Éoganacht Locha Léin). It is to be noted that, in this text, none of these was called an Éoganacht. Furthermore, such terms as Dessmumu and Íarmumu (South Munster and West Munster) were avoided. Instead of Éoganacht Raithlind or Dessmumu, we have simply Raithlend; instead of Íarmumu, Íarlúachair.⁵⁵ The peripheral Éoganachta beyond the inner circle were thus effectively demoted.

These more distant Éoganachta were, therefore, clients, but they were emphatically free rather than base clients. In a sentence that is close to being a direct quotation from the laws, it is said that, ‘if they accept the chattels of the king of Cashel, the render for his chattels is due to him from them, or they [the chattels] are to be returned to him, if that is what they want.’⁵⁶ Their relationship with the king of Cashel (and thus, it is to be understood, the Éoganachta of the inner circle) is defined by a series of terms:⁵⁷ they exchange hostages rather than the clients simply giving hostages to the overlord; their peoples enjoy legal rights in the others’ kingdoms; contracts can thus extend across boundaries from one

⁵⁴ Túadmumu, North Munster, was of less account until the period of the Tripartite Life, *VT*² 2411–21.

⁵⁵ Namely the lands to the west of Lúachair or Slíab Lúachra, the range of hills running north–south, approximately along the boundary between Co. Limerick and Co. Kerry.

⁵⁶ Cf. *CIH* 433.1; *Cáin Sóerraiht*, ed. Thurneysen, § 6.

⁵⁷ *Dál Caladbuig*, § 18: *comgíall, comauradas, comfonaídm*.

kingdom to another. The relationship is summarised in the last term of the list, *comchairde*: their kingdoms are established allies because their kings are kinsmen even if not all are full Éoganachta.

Apart from the kingdoms of Raithlend, Íarlúachair and Uí Fídgenti, there was another privileged group, also geographically peripheral, but of a rather different nature. It consisted of Osraige in the far east of Munster, on the borders of Leinster, and of Corcu Loígde in the far south-west, in what is now west Co. Cork. In both cases their freedom from tribute was said to be due to their having shared in the kingship of Munster at a remote period in the past. The Corcu Loígde were 'free – without tribute – from the lords of Munster because it is a half-share of lordship with the Éoganachta'.⁵⁸ 'The Osraige are not entitled to a grant from the king of Cashel, except what the king offers to them (as a mere gift), because there were kings of their race (over Munster).' A grant from the king of Cashel entailed a counter-payment of tribute, and because the Osraige did not pay tribute, they were not entitled to a grant. The origin-legends explaining the privileges of the Osraige and the Corcu Loígde may well have had more than a grain of historical truth. They appear to have claimed kinship with each other and may well have been among the rulers of Munster before the rise of the Éoganachta.⁵⁹ One message the *Frithfolad* text conveys is that these two groups were essentially akin – the respectable has-beens of Munster politics. The annals show, indeed, that there were periods when the Osraige were far from mere has-beens, but for all their political energy they were never counted among the Éoganachta.⁶⁰ Neither, in the *Frithfolad* text, were the three peripheral dynasties – Íarlúachair, Raithlend and Uí Fídgenti – counted as Éoganachta: they might have shared in the kingship in the past, but they were not intended to do so again. Yet there was still a danger that

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, § 13.

⁵⁹ Cf. the Life of Ciarán of Saiger in Plummer, *Vitae*, i.217, where the saint is born of an Osraige father and a Corcu Loígde mother; the birth takes place on Clear Island in Corcu Loígde territory, and he is also fostered there. He appears to have been the principal early patron saint of the Osraige and is said in the Life, c. 37, to have converted 'suam gentem, id est Osraighi'. Early evidence is offered by the Pilsworth ogam stone, found by the Nore in Osraige territory, but commemorating someone who in Old Irish would have been called Fedelmíad aue Muinchon moccu Loígde (i.e. belonging to the Corcu Loígde): McManus, *A Guide to Ogam*, pp. 73–4 (no. xiv). This inscription confirmed the argument of Ó Buachalla, 'Contributions Towards the Political History of Munster', 116–17, on the basis of 'Conall Corc and the Corcu Luigde', ed. K. Meyer, p. 63: when Conall Corc took the kingship of Munster 'the Osraige and the Corcu Luigde were exiled together, for they were in every quarter of the land [Munster] from Birr to the Confluence of Three Waters [Waterford Harbour]'.

⁶⁰ In the middle years of the eighth century Anmchad mac Con Cerae, king of Osraige, is shown by the Annals of Tigernach to have been militarily the most active king in Munster.

they might break back into the inner circle; moreover, their participation in the kingship was a matter of recent history, not of ancient legend (however true the legend may have been); and their genealogies showed them to be Éoganachta even if they were denied that title. These attitudes suggest that the *Frithfolad* text may be dated either to the first half of the eighth century, before the reign of Máel Dúin mac Áeda Bennáin (*ob.* 786), who belonged to the Éoganacht Locha Léin, or to the late eighth or early ninth century. It may not be later than the poem ascribed to Luccreth moccu Chíara but its political standpoint was very different. It was considerably earlier than the conquests of Máel Sechnaill I in the middle of the ninth century and the emergence of Dál Cais in the tenth.

With the indubitably base clientship of Dál Caladbuig there were, as we have seen, two main obligations: to provide a wright to build the king's house in Dún nEochaille and to provide food-renders. In *Frithfolad Muman* food-renders were only mentioned once, and then negatively, to deny that the Corcu Loígde owed *cís* (*census*, 'tribute'). The other form of obligation was, however, central: what *Frithfolad Muman* is essentially about is a relationship we may call 'ministerial clientship'; that is, the client is obliged to provide someone who will serve in a particular office in the king of Cashel's household. In ministerial clientship what counts is the nature and status of the office: it was one thing to provide, as did the Déissi, a judge together with his own company of three or four, quite another to owe, as did the Corcu Mo Druad of north-west Co. Clare, buffoons and door-keepers.

In these terms, the next most exalted vassal people after the Osraige and Corcu Loígde were the Múscraige. Their perpetual right and obligation was to provide the *ollam*, 'chief poet', of Cashel. Moreover, each poet of the Múscraige who passed three tests was entitled to the rank of *ollam*; and it was due to him from the Múscraige (not, that is, from the king of Cashel). The claim was, therefore, that poetry should be the preserve of the Múscraige. Appropriately, given the nature of the office, its justification lay in an origin-legend. Coirpre Músc, their ancestor, had made a poem for Fiachu Munlethan, ancestor of all the Éoganachta, and Clíu had been given him as the price of the poem. The point of this arrogant assertion was that Clíu formed the heartland of the Éoganachta, including their principal monastery at Emly and the site of Cnoc Áine, central to their origin-legends.

Since an *ollam* was, in status though not in the cruder forms of power, the equal of a minor king, the presence of the Múscraige in the king's

household in Cashel was far from demeaning. So, too, was the appearance of their principal king on festive occasions in Cashel:

Their king is to sit together with the king of Cashel, unless the king of the Uí Fídgenti is there, or the king of Íarlúachair or the king of Raithlend. And he raises his knee when they come, because only an exchange of hostages with them is due, but other kings rise up.⁶¹

The implication is that the king of the Múscraige was the equal of those Éoganachta outside the inner circle. So detailed and so bold were the text's claims on behalf of the Múscraige that there is a fair chance that the author came of that people.⁶²

Yet they were indeed an important people, or collection of peoples. It is notable, perhaps, that those with whom the king of the Múscraige openly aspired to equality did not include the Corcu Loígde: some origin-legends made them kinsmen, while others made the Múscraige immigrants into Munster, brought in as allies of the Éoganachta.⁶³ For this alliance with the Éoganachta one of these legends offers an explanation, in terms of geography rather than of pedigree. The ancestor of the Múscraige, Coirpre Músc, it says, 'took possession of the land from Brosnach to Dergmóin on the west side of Loch Léin . . . so that each arable ridge lies side by side with an arable ridge of the Éoganachta'.⁶⁴ The metaphor is of division of land by joint ploughing and thus of intermingled arable strips; the implication of the metaphor is that the Múscraige and the Éoganachta were to be treated as if they were kin.⁶⁵ Moreover the metaphor was essentially true, as Map 13 shows. *Frithfolad Muman* assumes that there is a king of all the Múscraige. His political standing would then reasonably entitle him to a status close to that of the Éoganachta themselves, while the distribution of Múscraige kingdoms

⁶¹ 'Dál Caladbuig', § 9 (emending *rig uile* to *rig aile*, since otherwise one would expect *ind rig uilí*). The 'rising up' of the other kings is the characteristic acknowledgement of clientship: *Cáin Sóerrath*, ed. Thurneysen, § 2. 'Raising the knee' was an acknowledgement of equality, as in *Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchy, § 48, lines 605–6; similarly *VT*² 473–5 (the heir of Patrick was to raise his knee before the heir of Erc of Slane).

⁶² If the survival of the short text on the Dál Caladbuig is to be explained by its having been transmitted from an early period in the company of *Frithfolad Muman*, then, since the Dál Caladbuig were situated within the territory of Múscraige mBreogain, *Frithfolad Muman* may itself originate from Múscraige mBreogain.

⁶³ O' Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology*, pp. 81–2; *De Maccaib Conaire*, ed. and tr. L. Gwynn, *Ériu*, 6 (1912), 144–53. ⁶⁴ *De Maccaib Conaire*, ed. Gwynn, p. 149 (lines 75–9).

⁶⁵ Cf. *Cóic Conara Fugill*, ed. and tr. R. Thurneysen, *Abhandlungen der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-hist. Klasse*, 1925, no. 2 (Berlin, 1926), H Recension, § 65, = *CIH* 1034.5–11; *CIH* 575.4–19.

across Munster, cheek by jowl with the Éoganachta, would impel them to measure themselves against their rulers rather than against Corcu Loígde.

The thin annalistic information for early Munster makes a full demonstration of the internal political arrangements of the Múscraige impossible. The likelihood, however, is that most Múscraige territories were minor kingdoms owing allegiance to their overlord, the king of all the Múscraige. Thus the Múscraige Tíre, the Múscraige nAirthir Femín, the Múscraige mBreogain and the rest would be kingdoms owing their primary allegiance not to some local overlord, as the main block of Dál Caladbuig owed allegiance to Cenél Fergusa Scandail at nearby Dún nEochaille, but to their own overlord, the king of all the Múscraige. Their political structure thus echoed that of the Éoganachta, similarly scattered but with one overking. As the kingship of Cashel was shared among a number of individual Éoganacht dynasties, so probably would some, at least, of the individual Múscraige kingdoms have shared the kingship of all the Múscraige.

There were, therefore, two different types of overkingdom in Munster. Some, such as Íarmumu and Dessmumu, west and south Munster, were geographical units; others, such as the Múscraige, were assemblages of geographically separate peoples, based on a shared identity. This identity consisted of a single ruling *gens*, the Múscraige, with origin-legends and pedigrees centred around a common ancestor, Coirpre Músc, but also a single office in the house of the king of Cashel at Munster, an office itself justified by origin-legend, the *ollamnas Caisil*, ‘office of chief poet of Cashel’.

The other peoples subject to the king of Cashel by ministerial clientship – by offices discharged in Cashel – were covered in less detail by *Frithfolad Muman*. For several of them, their names either as *gentes* or as peoples referred directly to their offices: the Araid (‘charioteers’) supplied a charioteer and horsemen; and here one should remember that in the sagas the charioteer, the *arae*, was the servant of the chariot-warrior, the *eirr*.⁶⁶ Similarly, the Cerdraige supplied *cerda*, ‘goldsmiths’, and *umaigi*, ‘bronze-smiths’; the Boindrige, named, apparently, after Boand, the goddess of the River Boyne, supplied a dairying steward (cf. *bó* ‘cow’).

The text of *Frithfolad Muman* itself offers evidence that this coupling of ministerial clientship and identity as a people was not a recent invention.

⁶⁶ In the Leinster genealogies the third grandest *gens*, Dál Cormaic, were *eirrid*, ‘chariot-fighters’, while the fourth, Dál Cairpri, were exiles among the Araid Cliach: *CGH* i.24–5.

The Fir Maige Féne, who gave their name to Fermoy, provided a *druí*, ‘druid’, for the king of Cashel. The legend explaining this obligation, somewhat singular in a Christian Munster claiming to have long eschewed druids, traced the descent of the Fir Maige from Mug Roith, said to be one of the innumerable sons of the Ulster hero, Fergus mac Roí, paramour of Medb, queen of the Connachta.⁶⁷ The legend explains that Mug Roith was one of the pupils of Simon Magus, and that they jointly made a wheel or a chariot (Mug Roith means ‘slave of a wheel’ and ‘wheel’ could be used of an entire chariot) which came across Europe the year before Simon Magus, Simon the Druid, had his unfortunate encounter with Peter (Acts 8:9–24). All this is good learned legend-making to put the Fir Maige Féne in their place. In the early eighth century they were the neighbours, and also the subjects, of Éoganacht Glendamnach, one of the Éoganachta of the inner circle. Their ministerial clientship to the king of Cashel in *Frithfolad Muman* suggests that they may recently have been detached from immediate subjection to the Éoganacht Glendamnach. Their ministerial office also appears to have been recent. The Corcu Mo Druad of north-west Co. Clare had a name meaning ‘The *Gens* of my Druid’. In *Frithfolad Muman* they were also ministerial clients of the king of Cashel, but the office that belonged to them was not that of the *druí*, ‘druid’, but the *drúth*, ‘buffoon, clown’. The similarity of the two words *druí* and *drúth* suggests that the office of *druí* had been taken from the Corcu Mo Druad and given to the Fir Maige Féne. If this is correct, however, it yields evidence that the scheme of ministerial clientship in *Frithfolad Muman* had been revised from an earlier one in which Corcu Mo Druad provided the king of Cashel’s druid. The scheme cannot have been invented by the author of *Frithfolad Muman*. The association of offices in Cashel with the names of some client *gentes* or peoples indicates that ministerial clientship had long been a crucial part of the political fabric of Munster; this, in turn, explains the central position of the *rigsuid* or *suid flatha*, ‘royal seat’, where offices were held, feasts celebrated and gifts handed over. It is no surprise that a central legend of the Éoganachta should be ‘the Finding of Cashel’, their royal seat.⁶⁸

A further demonstration of Cashel’s significance comes from comparing a passage in *Frithfolad Muman* with an annal entry for 715. In an optimistic aside the text envisages the possibility that the king of Leinster will

⁶⁷ CGH i.279; cf. ‘The Laud Genealogies’, ed. Meyer, 314–32.

⁶⁸ ‘The Story of the Finding of Cashel’, ed. Dillon, 61–73.

come to the feast in the king's house in Cashel.⁶⁹ If he does not, the principal kings from east and north-east Munster, the kings of Osraige and Éli, will occupy the compartments on either side of that of the king of Cashel. If he should come, the king of the Éli would then take second place.⁷⁰ In 715, at the outset of his reign, and at the beginning also of the unbroken sequence of Uí Dúnlainge kings, Murchad mac Brain, king of Leinster, came to Cashel. He came, however, in a *crech rí*g, 'king's raid', an inaugural hosting such as those often mounted by Uí Néill kings of Tara against Leinster. This inaugural hosting, symbolic of the intended direction of the reign, was primarily directed not at carrying off cattle and slaves, but at confronting the king of Cashel at Cashel. The seat of kingship to which client kings came in peace and submission was sought by Murchad in war and political defiance.⁷¹

We began this investigation into the political shape of Munster equipped with a simple distinction between the base clientship of the *aithechthúath* and the free clientship of more powerful dynasties. This then needed to be refined and elaborated. There was indeed an excellent example of an *aithechthúath* in Dál Caladbuig; but the clients of the king of Cashel appeared in a range of guises. First among the 'free peoples' were the members of the inner circle of the Éoganachta, descendants of Nad Froich, arranged around the Galty Mountains. *Frithfolad Muman* did not even mention them: its brief was with the client-peoples, not with the acknowledged contemporary sharers in the kingship of Cashel. Secondly, there were the Éoganachta of the periphery, sometimes denied the name of Éoganachta in spite of their acknowledged descent and recent sharing in the kingship of Cashel. The kings of the Uí Fídgenti, Raithlend and Íarlúachair, owed military service, while their peoples were in full treaty relationship, *comchairde*, with the king of Cashel and thus the other Éoganachta. If one of their kings came to a feast at Cashel, he had the privilege of sitting with the king of Munster in his compartment in the hall: he sat in the very seat of kingship. Still powerful and unambiguously free were the kings of Osraige and Corcu Loígde; the former, at least, had the seating compartment next to the

⁶⁹ *Dál Caladbuig*, § 11; contrast § 17, which perceives the Leinstermen as normal enemies of Munster.

⁷⁰ The significance of the king of the Éli is to be explained by the importance of their kingdom within north-eastern Munster, its closeness to Cashel and the consequent legend in 'The Story of the Finding of Cashel', ed. Dillon, §§ 2, 6, that the site of Cashel had belonged to the Éli before Conall Corc established his power there.

⁷¹ In 721, however, Murchad allied with Cathal mac Finnguini to harry Brega: AU 721.6.

king of Cashel. Their freedom, however, unlike that of the Éoganachta of the inner circle, needed to be insisted on: the Corcu Loígde were ‘free – without tribute – from the rulers of Munster’, and part of their exalted status was that they had no truck with ministerial clientship.

Once we come to the ministerial clients, we are moving away from the free peoples. This is only implied by *Frithfolad Muman*; the Corcu Loígde were free from tribute because they had had, however remotely, a half-share in the kingship of Munster. The ministerial client-kingdoms had no such claim. The Uí Liátháin of east Co. Cork sat on the very dividing line between free and base clientship. According to some views, they belonged with the Uí Fídgenti and the other peripheral Éoganachta: their ancestor was said to have been twin brother to the ancestor of the Uí Fídgenti, both of them being younger than the ancestor of the dynasties in the inner circle:

Their mother saw them lying in their cot, each with his back to the other, and a beetle in the middle between them – that is, the descendants of Mug Roith the druid – so that neither of them could come to the aid of the other.⁷²

In other words, Fir Maige Féne, the northern neighbours of the Uí Liátháin and firmly under the control of their neighbours to the west, Éoganacht Glendamnach, shut the Uí Liátháin off from the rest of Munster.⁷³ *Frithfolad Muman*, which did not include the Uí Liátháin among the peripheral Éoganachta, said of them only: ‘The hostages of the Uí Liátháin are not taken until those of all Munster are taken.’ This is as much as to say that they would not be taken in practice even though they might be taken in principle. Hostages were characteristically given by *aithechthúatha*, unless they were given by both sides, as with the Uí Fídgenti, Éoganacht Raithlind and Íarlúachair. In that case there was no implication of subjection, but that privileged relationship was characteristic of the peripheral Éoganachta, not of their inferiors. It is notable that ‘Conall Corc and the Corco Luigde’, an early eighth-century text from Cloyne, within the kingdom of the Uí Liátháin and its offshoot, Uí Meic Caille, was strongly pro-Éoganacht Glendamnach and included the claim that the land for Cloyne was given by a king of Éoganacht Glendamnach, not by the local king of the Uí Liátháin.⁷⁴ Since the gift of the land established a claim to be the *fine griain*, ‘the kindred of the land’, it gave Éoganacht Glendamnach rights within the church of

⁷² CGH i.205 (179a 35–8).

⁷³ In *Cáin Adomnáin*, the ruler of the Éoganacht Glendamnach was called king of Fir Maige Féne.

⁷⁴ ‘Conall Corc and the Corco Luigde’, ed. Meyer, p. 62, lines 8–11.

Cloyne only inferior to those of the founder and patron saint, Colmán mac Lénine.

Among the ministerial client-peoples there was an immense range of status, from the Múscraige who proudly claimed a monopoly on the office of chief poet – equal in rank to a minor king – to the Boíndrige who owed a steward to run the dairy farming on the king's demesne lands around Cashel. Yet even the Múscraige did not claim that they were free from the obligation to pay tribute and hand over hostages. The ministerial relationship appears to have been, therefore, a form of base clientship, associated with hostage-giving and tribute in the form of food-renders. Some ministerial clientships were relatively honourable, especially if they involved service in the royal house, above all in his *sanas*, his 'privy council'. Others, like the wright owed by Dál Caladbuig to the king of Cenél Fergusa Scandail, or the dairy steward of the Boíndrige, entailed only the making and provisioning of the king's house, not a presence within it. Yet at least the Boíndrige were subject to the king of Cashel; Dál Caladbuig had no function at Cashel but only at Dún nEochaille, the seat of their local overlords. However, even they, having paid their tribute, were invited into the house to help eat it.

(IV) *FORTÚATHA*, 'EXTERNAL PEOPLES'

Among 'free peoples' there was sometimes a distinction between 'external peoples', *fortúatha*, or 'external kindreds', *forluinti*, and peoples ruled by dynasties acknowledged as kin by the rulers of the province. The principle behind this distinction belongs to the sphere of origin-legend, but it may have had real political effects. The idea was that some peoples (or, more accurately, their ruling kindreds) were full *sóerthúatha* and part of the ruling alliance of related royal kindreds. So, for example, Cenél Maini, rulers of Southern Tethbae, were admitted, very possibly as a political fiction, to be a branch of the Uí Néill; and Patrick's remarks to their ancestor, quoted in the Tripartite Life, imply that they had a role in the making of the king of Tara even though they themselves were excluded from the kingship.⁷⁵ The Airgialla's distant kinship with the Uí Néill was undoubtedly fictitious and may not have enabled them to play an acknowledged role in choosing a king of Tara, yet it helped them to

⁷⁵ VT² 959–62, where *ernaidm* may have its usual sense of 'betrothal' but here applied to the betrothal of a king to his kingdom.

sustain their position as *sóerthúatha*. Other ruling kindreds, however, though related to the kings of the province of their supposed origin, were said to have migrated to another province. By origin and descent, therefore, they were *sóerthúatha*, but they were aliens in their new province and thus, as *fortúatha*, 'external peoples', subordinate to native *sóerthúatha*. The *Cíannachta*, for example, including the *Cíannacht Glinne Geimin*, around Dungiven in what is now Co. Londonderry, and *Cíannacht Breg* on the east coast north of Dublin, were said to be related to the *Eoganachta*, the ruling kindreds of Munster.⁷⁶ On this view, their blood was just about as blue as possible, but they were not thereby given a leading position in the politics of the north and the midlands, since in those provinces they were immigrants.

A story in the *Tripartite Life of St Patrick* confirms that native status might be necessary if a kindred was to have an accepted voice in the making of a king.⁷⁷ When Patrick came to the *Uí Amolngaid* of northern Connaught, he was confronted by a succession dispute: the twelve sons of *Amolngaid* were rivals. The text explains that 'there were twenty-four kindreds – that is, old kindreds – in the land. They had refused to accept as king over them a man with a nickname.' Óengus, the proudest of the twelve rivals, put satirical nicknames on his brothers. The twenty-four kindreds are likely to have been 'old' in the sense that they were acknowledged as native to the kingdom and were thus entitled to have a say in the choosing of a king.

The role of some client-kings in inaugurating a king of Tara matches a right mentioned in passing in the *West Munster Synod* (probably of the late eighth century).⁷⁸ It is there said that Patrick had given an instruction:

There should be no king in Cashel except from the children of *Nad Froích* [the 'inner circle'] and that it is he who places a king over every people in Munster and that there should be no king in the north other than the king of Tara and it is he who places a king over every people in Conn's Half.

The word for 'places', *suidigidir*, is literally 'put in a seat' (*suide*), so recalling the significance of the 'seat of kingship', *rígsuide* or *suide flatho*. This is contemporary evidence for royal inauguration, more reliable than many later texts that are more often invoked. The implication that it was a perquisite of the kings of Tara and of Cashel to confer upon their

⁷⁶ *CGH* i. 168–70, 246–8. ⁷⁷ *VT*² 1449–59.

⁷⁸ 'The Laud Genealogies', ed. Meyer, 315, 28–32. The *Máel Dúin* mentioned in 315, 27 is probably *Máel Dúin mac Áeda* of *Eoganacht Locha Léin*; see *AI*, AU 786.1.

client-kings the primary symbol of kingship, the royal seat, deserves more consideration than it has received. The West Munster Synod was concerned with Munster rather than with Tara; apparently, while it might maintain that the king of Cashel ought to have had a monopoly on this function, the king of West Munster (of the Éoganacht Locha Léin, the target of this text) had discharged it for his clients, such as the Cíarraige Lúachra. Royal inauguration, then, was an occasion when the political order was displayed. When a king of Tara was put into his seat, the proceedings showed who were the more privileged client-kings; when the client-king was inaugurated, the king of Tara (or Cashel) had the leading role.

Not all *fortúatha* were, like the Cíannachta, considered to be immigrants from another province. In Leinster the *fortúatha* were the peoples driven to the east, and less fertile, side of the Wicklow Mountains. For 709 the Annals of Ulster record a battle among the Fortúatha Laigen, 'the External Peoples of the Leinstermen', and, in 827, the death of a king of the Fortúatha at the hands of Norsemen.⁷⁹ This king appears to have belonged to the Uí Garrchon, a royal lineage of accepted native origin, related to the contemporary rulers of Leinster, the Uí Dúnlainge, but excluded from the kingship from an early period.⁸⁰ In Leinster, therefore, *fortúatha* may have been 'external' in the sense that they were not part of the process of choosing a king, rather than that they were regarded as aliens within the province.⁸¹

The origin-legend which explains why the Cíannacht Breg were settled close to Tara and were of the noblest blood, and yet were excluded from the kingship of Tara, is *Cath Crinna*, 'the Battle of Crinna'.⁸² Although it purports to be about the Cíannachta as a whole, it is in fact only about the Cíannacht Breg. The concerns of the Cíannacht Glinne Geimin are ignored. Moreover, the topographical details of the story reflect an important reduction in their territory

⁷⁹ AU 709.2; 827.9.

⁸⁰ He is probably the Conall son of Cú Chongalt in CGH i.39, who appears to have been misplaced in a confused pedigree, of which there are two main families of witnesses among the MSS cited by O'Brien. Some MSS give the heading *Ríg Fortuath*.

⁸¹ The right to influence the choice of a ruler should be distinguished from the issue of participation in the rite of inauguration, although the two may have gone together.

⁸² CGH i.403–5. The reference to a battle at Fochairt Muirthemne (line 14) may be an echo of the well-known historical battle in 735. The story is referred to in 'The Laud Genealogies', ed. Meyer, 314.18–19, as an alternative to another version, more favourable to Munster, whereby Fiachu Munlethan came to the aid of Cormac mac Airt against Dál nAraidi. Cf. Dillon, *The Cycles of the Kings*, p. 25.

inflicted on them in the early eighth century. The extant version of the story is late Middle Irish, but a forerunner may originally have been composed in the eighth century in the aftermath of this disaster. Before explaining the legend, therefore, we need to examine the decline in the fortunes of the *Cíannacht Breg* in the period 700–50.

In the seventh century the lands of the *Cíannacht Breg* were in three clearly distinct regions: in the north they held the hilly country of what is now the southern part of Co. Louth, between the River Dee and the Boyne; their central lands lay between the Boyne and the Delvin, around their main church, Duleek, 'the House of Stones', so called because it was built of stone when this was unusual in the east of the island, the church of their principal patron saint, *Cíannán*.⁸³ In the south they held the land by the east coast from the Delvin down to the Liffey. Between 702 and 742 much, at least, of the central region, between the Boyne and the Delvin, was taken from them by the *Uí Chonaing*, a northern branch of the *Uí Néill* ruling kindred of Brega, *Síl nÁeda Sláne*.⁸⁴ The *Uí Chonaing* had earlier been settled around *Tailtiu* and *Ráith Airthir* in the valley of the Blackwater; that district was left to another branch of *Síl nÁeda Sláne*, *Síl nDlúthaig*,⁸⁵ while the *Uí Chonaing* made the lower Boyne valley their home. By this acquisition they may have gained direct control of what was probably the major port of the area, *Inber Colpthai*. The surviving native kings of *Cíannacht Breg* continued to rule the northern area between the Boyne and the Dee, now known as *Ard Cíannachtae* (the upper or outer region of the *Cíannacht*) or *Ard Ua Cind Fáelad*, after the ruling family, descendants of *Cend Fáelad mac Gerthide* (*ob.* 662).⁸⁶ A related dynasty lost regal status but survived

⁸³ See maps 1 and 2, pp. 16 and 18.

⁸⁴ Compare AU 702.4 and 742.7. The latter is an obit of *Conaing mac Amalgaid*, the former an obit of *Ailill* son of *Cenn Fáelad*; both are described as kings of the *Cíannacht* (Breg), but while the 702 obit is of a member of the native dynasty, *Conaing* belonged to the *Uí Chonaing* branch of *Síl nÁeda Sláne*. *Ard Cíannachtae* was also known as *Ard Ua Cinn Fáelad* after *Ailill*'s father, *Cenn Fáelad mac Gerthide*. In his obit, 662.2, he is not given any title by AU, but AT calls him king of *Ard Cíannachtae*; this is likely to be a retrospective addition. On the other hand, AU 688.4, has the obit of a *Dub dá Inber*, king of *Ard Cíannachtae*, so it is possible that the land north of the Boyne was a sub-kingdom of *Cíannacht Breg* before the *Uí Chonaing* took the central lands between Boyne and Delvin for their kingdom.

⁸⁵ For example, the obits of *Dúngal mac Flainn* (AU 743.2), king of *Cúla* (Breg) and of *Cathal mac Fiachrach*, king of *Ráith Airthir* and *Fir Chúl* (AU 810.1).

⁸⁶ But not including the land around the Boyne valley neolithic tombs, Newgrange, Knowth and Dowth: Knowth was to become the 'seat of kingship' for the *Uí Chonaing*: AU 789.4. The name *Fir Arda Cíannachtae* gave its name to the later barony of Ferrard (cf. Ferrard Cross on the 1/2" at o 13 89); AU 662.2; 749.5

as the kindred in control of the major church of Lusk in southern Brega.⁸⁷

This southern branch of the *Cíannacht Breg* may explain important early evidence about the layout of their territories. In his *Life of Columba*, Adomnán tells a story about a disease-bearing rain-cloud rising in the morning from the sea north of Iona, a cloud which, Columba prophesied, would that evening drop rain onto the area between the River Delvin and Áth Clíath, ‘the ford of hurdles’, across the Liffey.⁸⁸ This area, the southernmost of the three contiguous *Cíannacht* districts distinguished above, is named by Adomnán later in the same chapter as *Ard Cénachte*, an early form of *Ard Cíannachtae*.⁸⁹ For Adomnán in the late seventh century, therefore, at a date not long before the intrusion of the *Uí Chonaing* into the lower Boyne valley, *Ard Cíannachtae* was the southernmost part of *Cíannacht Breg* territory, while by 749 it had come to refer to the northernmost area, between the lower Boyne and the Dee. It is unlikely to be a coincidence that the last royal member of the family that later held the church of Lusk was killed at the battle of Allen in 722. The likeliest theory would distinguish two elements in the reduction of *Cíannacht* territory: first, not long after 722, royal authority over the lands between the Delvin and the Liffey was taken from the southern dynasty of the *Cíannacht Breg*, probably by the *Uí Chernaig*, kings of *Loch nGabor*, the southern branch of *Síl nÁeda Sláine*; secondly, between 702 and 742 a northern branch of *Síl nÁeda Sláine*, the *Uí Chonaing*, took most of the central district, between the Boyne and the Delvin. Before 722, the southern area, being ruled by a separate dynasty, was called *Ard Cíannachtae*; by 746, this name had been transferred to the northern district between Boyne and Dee. A plausible context for this double aggrandisement would be the reign of Cináed mac Írgalaig as king of Tara, c. 723–8. Cináed was the last king of Tara from *Síl nÁeda Sláine* until the tenth century. When, however,

⁸⁷ Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, p. 162; *CGH* i.168, where the dynasty is called *Cíannacht* by *R* and *Cíannacht Midi* by the Books of Lecan and Ballymote. According to *CGH* i.246 (153 b 50ff.), this dynasty should have been of the *Gailenga*, related to but distinct from the *Cíannachta*; this suggests that they may be identical with the *Gailenga Collumrach* of AU 884.7, since *Collamair* seems to have been between the Delvin and Turvey (Hogan, *Onom.*, s.vv: *Collamair* and *Collamair Breg*). The genealogical link between the *Gailenga* and the *Cíannachta* may have been created partly so as to incorporate the *Gailenga Collumrach* and the nearby *Gailenga Becca* (in what is now the northern part of Dublin, around Finglas) within a wider *Cíannacht* territory. This would explain why they sometimes appear to be most closely related to the *Luigni*, sometimes to the *Cíannachta*. ⁸⁸ Adomnán, *VSC* ii.4.

⁸⁹ *Ard Cénachte*, the reading of the B MSS, is earlier than the intermediate spelling *Ard Ceannachte* in the A MS.

other branches of the Uí Néill held the kingship of Tara, they would have had an interest in preventing the Uí Chonaing and Uí Chernaig, their rivals, from entrenching themselves at the expense of one of the principal vassal-peoples of the Uí Néill.

Even an important *fortúath*, therefore, such as Ciánnacht Breg, could not always avoid territorial loss. Both their former greatness when their lands covered all the eastern parts of Brega, and the subsequent confinement of their kingdom to the new Ard Ciánnachtae, north of the Boyne, are reflected in the story of the Battle of Crinna. The ancestor of the Ciánnachta (both of Glenn Geimin and of Brega), and also of the related dynasties of the Gailenga and the Saitne, was Tadhg mac Céin ('Badger son of Swift'). He is said to have been summoned from Munster to come to the aid of Cormac mac Airt, legendary ancestor of, and model king for, the Uí Néill and the Connachta. Cormac mac Airt's gifts lay in wisdom and judgement rather than in war – he was the Solomon of the Irish – and Tadhg mac Céin's help was necessary to enable Cormac to take revenge on the Ulstermen for a particularly loathsome insult (they held a candle up to Cormac and so burnt most of his hair) and to expel them from northern Brega. Just as the origin-legend of 'the Three Collas' had the ancestors of the Airgíalla conquering most of the lands of the Ulaid in the north, so the ancestor of the Ciánnacht is supposed to have done the same for the southern lands of the Ulstermen.⁹⁰ Cormac mac Airt is said to have spent the day of the battle in most unheroic style, hidden in a ditch behind his army, with a servant dressed up to look like the king. The battle began by the Boyne at Newgrange, and Tadhg drove the Ulaid north to a stream called Glas Nera beside Druim Inasclaind (Dromiskin, near the coast about six miles north of Drogheda). That is to say, Tadhg had driven the Ulstermen out of what became, from the early eighth century onwards, Ard Ciánnachtae. He had even carried the campaign a mile or two into the neighbouring kingdom of Conailli Muirthemne. Tadhg was wounded with three spear-thrusts, but nevertheless he set out in his chariot to drive round Brega. He fainted from his wounds, but revived when he reached Áth Clíath:

'What journey have we come, lad?' he said.

'We have come a good way,' said the lad.

'Have we got Tara?' said Tadhg.

'No,' said the lad.

Tadhg gave him a blow and killed him (*CGH* i.404).

⁹⁰ It is quite likely that the resemblance of the two stories is not accidental, and that 'the Battle of Crinna' borrowed the theme from 'the Three Collas'.

The lands running south along the coast to Áth Cliath, the ford of the Liffey by Dublin, were the old territories of Cíannacht Breg. Tadhg presumably intended to drive right-handwise (*deisel*) round Brega, so including Tara, but by evening he had only done the southwards leg of the journey. Not only, then, was Tara outside their control, but the only district over which they retained royal authority by 750 was the land they claimed to have conquered from the Ulstermen north of the Boyne.⁹¹ In the end the Uí Néill left them nothing as kings but what they had conquered themselves.

Yet, although this example demonstrates that political boundaries were far from immutable, it also illustrates the tenacious attachment kindreds had for lands they remembered as theirs. The southern branch of the Cíannacht Breg stepped sideways into the church of Lusk; once the power of the Dublin Norse began to decline, a kingdom of Saitne appeared in the same area, ruled by a dynasty claiming descent from Tadhg mac Céin. In an earlier chapter, we met a similar example, the church of Connor, of an old royal kindred hanging on as an ecclesiastical family.⁹²

In the midlands, 'between the Shannon and the sea', the area that Tírechán and others saw as the land of the Uí Néill, even free peoples ruled by undoubtedly native dynasties could be subjected to territorial attrition. As we have seen when considering the emergence of the Uí Néill, in the sixth century Cenél Fiachach maic Néill probably held lands stretching from Uisnech to Slieve Bloom and from Birr to the Leinster frontier near Tullamore. By the late sixth century this branch of the Uí Néill had been excluded from the kingship. By the ninth century the southern part of its territory was known as Tír Cell, 'the Land of Churches', inhabited by the Fir Chell, 'the Men of Churches'.⁹³ The churches in question included Birr, Kinnity and Lynally, the first two being on the boundary with Munster. The fertile strip of land sloping away from Slieve Bloom northwards towards the boglands was no longer known by the name of Cenél Fiachach. The territory further north, from Uisnech to Rahugh, may have been incorporated into the lands of Cland Cholmáin, kings of Mide. In the post-Norman period, two families emerged both claiming descent from Cenél Fiachach, Uí Máelmúaid (O'Molloy) and Meic Aedacán (Mageoghegan), centred respectively in the southern and northern portions of the sixth-century

⁹¹ For the tradition of the Boyne as the southern frontier of the Ulstermen, see *CIH* 1116.1 (*Bretha Nemed Dédenach*): 'Woe to the Ulstermen if they be beyond the Boyne'. ⁹² Above, pp. 61–4.

⁹³ AU 840.

kingdom, of which the northern part, Mageoghegan's Country, was still known as Cenél Fiachach.⁹⁴ If these genealogical claims were true, they show that Cenél Fiachach survived its dismemberment.

The means used to reduce its power and territory deserve close examination. The monastery of Durrow was founded by Columba, a member of the Uí Néill, probably between 585 and his death in 597.⁹⁵ In 587 Áed mac Bricc, the principal saint of Cenél Fiachach, died. The distance from Durrow to Rahugh, Áed's principal church in Mide, is under four miles. Durrow is likely to have been founded through the power of the king of Tara, Áed mac Ainmirech, Columba's kinsman, rather than through the generosity of a king of Cenél Fiachach. Similarly, the foundations of Birr, Kinnitty, Lynally and Rahan, as well as Durrow, made the district into 'the Land of Churches', yet they were not foundations that enhanced the reputation of Cenél Fiachach. Both Colmán Ela of Lynally and Áed mac Bricc became general Uí Néill saints, although Colmán Ela was not in origin of the Uí Néill at all and Áed mac Bricc belonged to an excluded branch, Cenél Fiachach.⁹⁶ One means, therefore, by which the power of Cenél Fiachach was reduced was generosity to the Church – the overking using the lands of his client-king to enrich his foundation. Moreover, whether the grant of land was by a king of Cenél Fiachach to a saint of Cenél Fiachach, as the grant of Rahugh may well have been, or a grant made by a king of Tara (who belonged to Cenél Conaill) to the great saint of Cenél Conaill, as probably at Durrow, the result in the end was much the same. The churches were not churches of Cenél Fiachach but of the Uí Néill. The land on which the monasteries were founded, however, probably had been Cenél Fiachach land. The leading Uí Néill kings were thus capable of weakening rival Uí Néill dynasties by endowing monasteries with their rivals' land. Moreover, they may have shown a notable sense of time and place in doing so: Durrow was founded within a few years of the death of Áed mac Bricc and only about four miles from Ráith Áeda maic Bricc (Rahugh).

Outside Munster there is no good evidence for ministerial clientship until the later Middle Ages, and then it is of a rather different character:

⁹⁴ Book of Ballymote, 83 b-84 a (see Appendix vii). Various Uí Máelmúaid are kings of Fir Chell (AT 1139, 1142), but at AT 1156 Áed mac Donnchadha Húa Máelseachlainn is *rí Fer Cell*. Mageoghegan's Country was around Castle Geoghegan in Westmeath (in the sixteenth century it became the barony of Moycashel); O'Molloy's Country was around Kilcormac, Co. Offaly: Walsh, *Placenames of Westmeath*, pp. 245–9 (in late medieval and early modern texts Cenél Fiachach appears as Kenalagh, Kyneliagh etc). ⁹⁵ See above, p. 282.

⁹⁶ *Vita S. Aidi*, c. 1 (ed. Heist, *Vitae*, p. 167), *Fél.*² 10 November.

subordinate rulers themselves held offices in the royal household, which might be conjoined with specific roles in the royal inauguration.⁹⁷ There are no exact equivalents to the Boíndrige supplying a dairy steward or the Araid providing chariot warriors and horsemen – no more peoples defined by ministerial clientship. What seems to have been of greater importance outside Munster as a means of assembling in one place the power and authority of society was the *óenach*. We have already met this institution in the contexts of conversion and the organisation of the Church, but its main features may be summarised here before we consider its political uses.

(v) THE *ÓENACH*

The principal and best-attested *óenach* was that of Tailtiu in Brega. It was an annual event, probably held at the feast of Lugnasad at the beginning of August. The site included raised platforms with seats for those of higher rank. The area at Tailtiu in which the *óenach* was held was protected by a special *blai*, an immunity from any act of violence.⁹⁸ A passage in the Tripartite Life of Patrick, here perhaps deriving from early in the ninth century, gives the saint's blessing to this *blai* of the *óenach Tailten*;⁹⁹ it also records one occasion when the immunity was threatened during the reign of Donnchad mac Domnaill (*ob.* 797).¹⁰⁰ According to the Poem on the Airgialla, the offence of creating a disturbance in the *óenach* was one of the four offences which the king of the Uí Néill could judge on his own authority.¹⁰¹ The same poem suggests that the seating of the main kings – perhaps the same as the 'platforms' mentioned in the annals – was arranged so as to reproduce the relative positions of the provinces of Ireland, and that each king might arrange the seating within his own area.¹⁰² This may seem fanciful, but there is good annalistic evidence for the participation of the Leinstermen, at least, in an *óenach* outside their own province, although they had their own *óenach* at Carman.¹⁰³

Events in 827 provide the clearest evidence, but their background was

⁹⁷ M. Dillon, 'The Inauguration of O'Connor', in J. A. Watt, J. B. Morrall and F. X. Martin (eds.), *Medieval Studies presented to Aubrey Gwynn S.J.* (Dublin, 1961), p. 189; Simms, *From Kings to Warlords*, pp. 81–3.

⁹⁸ *Audacht Morainn*, ed. Kelly, § 28, specifies horse-racing, no doubt as a specially risky occasion.

⁹⁹ VT² 767–8.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 767–82.

¹⁰¹ 'Poem on the Airgialla', ed. O Daly, stanzas 31–3.

¹⁰² For the platforms see AU 831.5.

¹⁰³ Cf. AU 841.5 for the significance of Carman. The site is uncertain; cf. A. P. Smyth, *Celtic Leinster* (Dublin, 1982), pp. 34–5.

the uncertain authority as king of Tara of Conchobor mac Donnchada of Cland Cholmáin.¹⁰⁴ He succeeded the much more effective Áed Oirdnide of Cenél nÉogain after the latter's death in 819. During Conchobor's reign the Viking attacks, largely in abeyance in Áed Oirdnide's time, accelerated sharply. In 822 the Uí Néill of Brega attempted to go over to Murchad mac Máele Dúin of Cenél nÉogain. This desertion, *élud*, was punished by Conchobor not only in battle but also by exacting 'hostages under compulsion' from the defeated Uí Chernaig of southern Brega: a proud branch of the Uí Néill was being treated as an *aithechthúath*. This was not the end of Conchobor's troubles: quite apart from the Vikings, his kingdom was the target of attacks by an unprecedentedly aggressive king of Munster, Fedlimid mac Crimthainn. The king of Cenél nÉogain whom Conchobor had outmanoeuvred in 822 was deposed in 824; the new king, Níall Caille, son of Áed Oirdnide, established a firm grip on rebellious vassals in 827 by defeating an alliance between the Ulstermen and the Uí Chremthainn (of Fernmag near Monaghan town and of Clogher) at Leth Cam a few miles from Armagh. In the same year as Leth Cam, Conchobor is said to have disrupted the *óenach* of Tailtiu by attacking the Gailenga, as a result of which many died. Shortly afterwards 'the *óenach* of Colmán' was disrupted by an attack made by Muiredach mac Rúadrach, king of Leinster, on the Laigin Desgabair, namely the Leinstermen of the south, beyond the hills around Baltinglass.¹⁰⁵

The likelihood is that this *óenach* of Colmán was the *óenach* of Colmán Ela, patron saint of Lynally, in Tír Cell, 'Land of Churches'. His *óenach* was reckoned to be one of the three most famous *óenaige* of Ireland in a collection of triads put together in the ninth century.¹⁰⁶ Colmán Ela's feastday, 26 September, was followed exactly a week later by the feast of his nativity, 3 October.¹⁰⁷ It may be suggested that the *óenach* was held at Lynally in the week between the two feasts. This fits the annalistic evidence, since the entry under 827 on the *óenach* of Colmán follows the one about the *óenach* of Tailtiu, and the latter was probably held at the beginning of August.¹⁰⁸

There is an apparent conflict between annalistic and other evidence on the disruption of the fair, *commixtio agonis*, *coscrad óenaige*. Other texts, apart from the annals, treat this as a serious offence against the

¹⁰⁴ AU 827.6. ¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 827.4 (Leth Cam), 5 (óenach Taillten), 6 (óenach Colmáin).

¹⁰⁶ *The Triads of Ireland*, ed. Meyer, no. 35. But cf. CGH i. 230 (152 a 10).

¹⁰⁷ *The Martyrology of Tallaght*, ed. Best and Lawlor, pp. 74, 76.

¹⁰⁸ M. Mac Neill, *The Feast of Lughnasa*, pp. 311–38.

presiding king.¹⁰⁹ Yet the annals suggest that the offence was usually committed by kings, sometimes even by the king of Tara himself.¹¹⁰ When the Tripartite Life declared that the *blai*, the immunity from violence, enjoyed by the *óenach* of Tailtiu was not violated, its assertion can readily be refuted: Conchobor's disruption of 827 is only one of several counter-examples. On the other hand, one of the other two of the trio of disruptions that, according to the poem on the Airgíalla, the king of Tara could judge on his own authority – the disturbance to a *dúnad*, an encampment – is recorded as being committed against rather than by a king.¹¹¹ The paradox is heightened by the proceedings of 811, when the community of Tallaght (in Leinster) prevented the holding of the Fair of Tailtiu as a means of compelling Áed Oirdnide and the Uí Néill to pay handsome compensation for an offence.¹¹²

A possible answer to the paradox is that the Fair of Tailtiu, by concentrating the royal and ecclesiastical power of much of Ireland, also concentrated most of its tensions. The *blai* was necessary precisely because so many feuds and enmities might otherwise have erupted into violence. The annals, when they recorded disruptions of the Fair, were noting exceptional events. Moreover, such disruptions seem usually to have had a context: that instigated by Fogartach mac Néill in 717 was perpetrated by a man who undoubtedly had ambitions to be king of Tara;¹¹³ those by Donnchad mac Domnaill in 774 and 776 were committed by an exceptionally aggressive ruler who was forcing his way into the kingship of Tara by violence.¹¹⁴ In 827 Conchobor, Donnchad's son, was attacking one of his major client-kingdoms, a people whose territories lay not far to the north-west of Tailtiu. In the other disruption of that year, the king of Leinster, based in the north of the province, was attacking his principal vassals, the rulers of southern Leinster. In both incidents, the events probably indicate the fragility of the authority exercised by particular rulers.

The early eighth-century lawtract *Críth Gablach* presents the *óenach* as the leading occasion on which king and people met to do business.¹¹⁵ It

¹⁰⁹ *Audacht Moraimn*, ed. Kelly, § 28; 'Poem on the Airgíalla', ed. O Daly, stanza 32.

¹¹⁰ AU 717.6; 774.7; 776.6. ¹¹¹ AU 730.8. ¹¹² AU 811.2.

¹¹³ According to most lists, he was king of Tara after Fergal mac Maíle Dúin was killed at the battle of Allen in 722: *LL* 94–7; *AI*, pp. 42–4; B. Mac Carthy, *The Codex Palatino-Vaticanus*, No. 830, Todd Lecture Series 3 (Dublin, 1892), pp. 93–6; 'The Laud Synchronisms', ed. Meyer, 479; *CGH* i.125.

¹¹⁴ Some Middle Irish regnal lists imply that Níall Frossach had already abdicated in 770, but this may just be an inference from AU 770.8, and seems too early, to judge by AU 771.10, 772.3 (these two seem to have been expeditions designed to bring pressure to bear on Níall Frossach); 777.6; 778.1 (this last battle against Síl nÁeda Sláne seems to have been decisive, to judge by 778.4).

¹¹⁵ *Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchy, lines 502–8 and Legal Glossary, p. 102.

was the natural setting for the display of royal power and popular consensus, all the more effective because it was not just an occasion for serious business but the biggest party in Ireland – indeed, a party to which most Irishmen of sufficient rank were invited. It was a calamity if, on any such occasion, one's best party clothes had been pledged and could not be redeemed for the occasion; presumably slaves and others too poor to have party as opposed to working clothes did not participate.¹¹⁶ The Church was there in strength. Another scandalous disruption, also in the reign of the unfortunate Conchobor, occurred in 831 when there was a riot 'at the platforms' and, worse still, around the shrine of Mac Cuilinn, patron saint of Lusk in southern Brega, and also around the relics of St Patrick. Nor were churchmen there merely to give the relics of their saints the opportunity to be revered by much of Ireland. Tailtiu was used as the venue for a synod. As we have seen, Columba was excommunicated on one occasion by a synod, probably of churchmen from the kingdoms of the Uí Néill, and subsequently came – perhaps the next year – to plead his case before the same synod sitting at Tailtiu.¹¹⁷ The *Vita Prima* of Brigit brought the saint to a meeting at Tailtiu at which she resolved a claim of paternity.¹¹⁸

For laymen the *óenach* may have been the natural setting for an *airecht*. Old Irish has no single word for a court of law. On the one hand, ordinary disputes, as over a contract, might be heard in the judge's house.¹¹⁹ On the other hand, some cases were heard in the full publicity of an *airecht*, an assembly of the *airig*, 'nobles', such as that presided over by the king of Tara assisted by others.¹²⁰ Such a judicial assembly fulfilled three needs: there were the legal experts to provide knowledge of the law; the kings to provide political authority; and the *airig* to ensure the widest possible publicity. The *airecht*, in other words, deployed the expertise, the authority, the present awareness and the future memory of society to resolve legal cases. If the *airecht* sat at Tailtiu, the social force thus focused was that of half Ireland.

(VI) THE CÁIN

The *óenach* was also a normal setting for the promulgation of a special kind of edict known as a *cáin* or *rechtge*. To understand this device by which kings and churchmen might mobilise the authority of society we

¹¹⁶ *CIH* 468.28–469. 32. ¹¹⁷ Adomnán, *VSC* iii.3.

¹¹⁸ *Vita Prima S. Brigitae*, tr. Connolly, c. 39; the meeting is called a *conuentus* and a *concilium* but not a synod. ¹¹⁹ *Cóic Conara Fugill*, ed. Thurneysen, p. 25, § 27.

¹²⁰ F. Kelly, 'An Old Irish Text on Court Procedure', *Peritia*, 5 (1986), 74–106, esp. 77–82.

have three complementary forms of evidence: first, what is said about the *cáin* in ordinary legal texts, notably by *Críth Gablach* in its account of kingship; secondly, the annalistic references to the promulgation of *cánai*; and, finally, the complete texts of two *cánai*, that of Adomnán, abbot of Iona, promulgated in 697 and renewed in 727, and *Cáin Domnaig*, the Law of Sunday, promulgated at some date in the eighth century after 734;¹²¹ and also one *cáin* for which we have at least part of the text, *Cáin Fúithirbe*, promulgated in Munster c. 680.¹²²

Críth Gablach's account cites *Cáin Adomnáin* as an example of one kind of *rechtge*.¹²³ It begins by enumerating three exactions which a king may enforce upon his people or peoples – the text shifts from singular *túath* to plural *túatha* suggesting that both a single *túath* and a collection of *túatha* with an overking might be intended. One of these exactions is an *óenach*, but *Críth Gablach* immediately qualifies its statement by saying that 'the ordering of an *óenach* belongs to a people; what he pledges upon an *óenach* pertains to the king, provided what he pledges is lawful' (by 'pledging' is meant taking pledges, things of value, from heads of kindreds to guarantee good behaviour). A *rechtge*, then, is something which a king can 'pledge upon his peoples', apparently at an *óenach*. *Críth Gablach* continues in its school-room style to list the four types of *rechtge*:

The *rechtge* of native law, first – peoples adopt it, it pertains to a king to confirm it. The other three *rechtgi* are enforced by a king: a *rechtge* after a battle has been won against them, so that he then brings together his peoples that there be no mutual fighting among them; and a *rechtge* after a plague; and a king's *rechtge* such as the *rechtge* of the king of Cashel among the Munstermen.

Three other *rechtgi* are then added, which a king may also pledge upon his peoples; perhaps we are to understand them to be examples of a king's *rechtge*:

A *rechtge* to repel a foreign race, that is, against the English, and a *rechtge* to bring in the harvest, and a *rechtge* of faith which kindles [piety], such as the law of Adomnán.¹²⁴

Críth Gablach, therefore, associates the *rechtge* with an *óenach*; it suggests that it may be imposed upon one *túath* or several; and it cites a range of *rechtgi* covering a wide spectrum from special royal edicts to meet emergencies to religious edicts such as the law of Adomnán or edicts designed

¹²¹ *Cáin Adomnáin*, ed. Meyer; *Cáin Domnaig*, ed. V. Hull, 151–77.

¹²² Breatnach, 'The Ecclesiastical Element in the Old-Irish Legal Tract *Cáin Fhúithirbe*', 45–6.

¹²³ *Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchy, line 524; this reference, with other evidence, helps to date the text to the first half of the eighth century. ¹²⁴ *Críth Gablach*, ed. Binchy, § 38, lines 515–21, 522–4.

to reinforce rules of native law. What it says is topical, not just because of its reference to *Cáin Adomnáin*, but also because of its earlier mention of the use of an edict in the course of repelling an invasion by a foreign people, such as the English. This is very likely to be a reference to the Northumbrian invasion of Brega in 684. *Críth Gablach's* evidence is also important because it is not confined to the more dramatic and wide-ranging edicts such as the Law of Adomnán, but also envisages any king, small or great, promulgating a *rechtge*, about mundane and temporary emergencies, such as the prospect of harvest failure, as much as about general rules of law.

The annalistic evidence, on the other hand, is confined to the more important edicts. The annals do not mention any edict whose territorial scope is less than a province. They do, however, show that the edict changed in character during the eighth century; and they imply that this form of power was a principal victim of the Viking attacks once they became more grave after the death of Áed Oirdnide in 819. Like most annalistic entries, those about *cánai* tend to err on the side of brevity. We may begin by considering a group of entries concerning *cánai* promulgated in Connaught; these were all, therefore, provincial *cánai*. A good, because reasonably explicit yet typical, example is given by the Annals of Ulster s.a. 793: 'Lex Comain la Aildobur 7 Muirghus for teora Connachta', 'The Law of Commán by Aildobur and Muirgus on the three Connachta'. This law is the property of a patron saint, the man who gave his name to Roscommon (Ross Commáin), one of the principal churches in Connaught, on the edge of its best agricultural land, Mag nAí. Commán had been dead for nearly fifty years when this edict was promulgated.¹²⁵ Aildobur, on the other hand, was a living churchman, the abbot of Roscommon and thus the heir of Commán.¹²⁶ Muirgus mac Tommaltaig was king of the Connachta;¹²⁷ he belonged to the Uí Briúin Aí, the ruling dynasty of Mag nAí, a dynasty which had established a monopoly of the kingship since 773. Although the scope of the edict of 793 might extend to 'the Three Connachta' (Uí Briúin, Uí Fiachrach and Uí Ailella), it was very much an expression of the hegemony of Mag nAí, of its ruling dynasty, Uí Briúin Aí, and of its own local saint, Commán of Roscommon.

Muirgus was involved, the year before his death in 815, in the promulgation of another edict: 'Lex Quiarani for Cruachna eleuata est la Muirgus', 'The Law of Cíarán was established upon Crúachain by

¹²⁵ AU 746.12.

¹²⁶ His obit is *ibid.*, 800.1.

¹²⁷ His obit is *ibid.*, 815.1.

Muirgus.¹²⁸ Here again the law was the law of a saint, but this time a greater one than Commán, Cíarán of Clonmacnois. Although Cíarán's monastery lay on the Mide bank of the Shannon, it had had strong interests among the Connachta since the late seventh century at least.¹²⁹ So far, this example is typical (laws of Cíarán had been promulgated in Connaught in 744 and in 788, in both instances in periods of Uí Briúin Aí dominance), but otherwise the phrasing is unusual. First, instead of the standard phrase for the people subjected to the law, 'for teora Connachta', 'on the Three Connachta', it has 'for Cruachna', 'on Crúachain'. Crúachain was the prehistoric complex of sites in Mag nAí, by this date believed to be the immemorial seat of kingship for the province.¹³⁰ It was also the site of one of the three principal *óenaige* of Ireland, together with the *óenach* of Tailtiu and the *óenach* of Colmán Ela.¹³¹ With *Críth Gablach*'s evidence in mind, we may entertain the possibility that Muirgus promulgated this law of Cíarán at an *óenach* of the province held at Crúachain. To make much of the site of Crúachain would be understandable in a king whose base was Mag nAí. The entry is also remarkable, however, because, unlike that of 793, the law is said to be promulgated by a king, not by a leading churchman alone nor by a churchman and king in partnership (such as Aildobur and Muirgus on the earlier occasion). The entry thus makes the promulgation in 814 appear a more secular affair than its counterpart in 793.

The choice of Crúachain as the site for the promulgation of an edict was, however, no bar to explicit clerical involvement.¹³² This is shown by a law promulgated in 783, recorded in an entry written entirely in Irish:

Forus Cano Patraic hi Cruachnaibh la Dub da Leithi 7 la Tipraite filium Taidhgg.

The enactment of the Law of Patrick in Crúachain by Dub dá Leithe and by Tipraite son of Tadgg.¹³³

In its use of the phrase 'forus cáno', 'the enactment of the Law', this entry echoes a phrase used repeatedly in *Cáin Adomnáin*, promulgated eighty-six years earlier in 697.¹³⁴ In comparison with the law of 814, however, it is striking that in 783 Crúachain was introduced as the place at which the edict was enacted rather than as the place symbolising the

¹²⁸ AU 814.11. ¹²⁹ Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 25, 47.

¹³⁰ See above, pp. 469–71.

¹³¹ *The Triads of Ireland*, ed. Meyer, no. 35.

¹³² In spite of the attitude of *Fíliú Óengusso*, ed. Stokes, p. 24, for which see above, p. 469.

¹³³ AU 783.9. The use of Irish is found elsewhere in entries containing technical terms and is not, therefore, to be taken as a sign of later addition to the annal.

¹³⁴ *Cáin Adomnáin*, ed. Meyer, §§ 34, 36, 39–41, 48.

whole province: the 814 law was *elevata*, ‘raised’, in other words put into force by a public promulgation, ‘upon Crúachain’, where the phrase ‘for Cruachna’, replaced ‘for teora Connachta’, ‘upon the Three Connachta’; the implication is that the law was imposed ‘upon Crúachain’ as the pre-eminent royal seat of the Connachta. The existence of the *óenach* of Crúachain is the best explanation of these turns of phrase: the law could be imposed upon Crúachain because at the *óenach* was assembled the political and social power of the Connachta.

Those said to impose the Law of Patrick in 783 were Dub dá Leithe, abbot of Armagh, and Tipraite mac Taidgg, king of the Connachta. Tipraite’s role is interesting in that the current ruler of Tara, Donnchad mac Domnaill, favoured the *familia* of Columba rather than Armagh; in 778 the Law of Columba had been promulgated by Donnchad and by Bresal, abbot of Iona. In 789 Donnchad would ‘insult the Staff of Jesus and the relics of Patrick at Ráith Airthir on the occasion of an *óenach*’ (presumably that of Taitiu, adjacent to Ráith Airthir). By this stage there was a clear pattern by which the alternation between Cland Cholmáin and Cenél nÉogain kings of Tara was mirrored by an alternation between Iona and Armagh as the most favoured church of the Uí Néill. What Tipraite mac Taidgg did in 783 was to favour the church currently out of favour with the king of Tara. He may have wished to be seen to pursue an independent ecclesiastical policy.

The *cánai* of the eighth and early ninth centuries were normally in force for a limited period, perhaps seven years, probably because they were guaranteed by *aitiri*, special public sureties whose periods of office were themselves limited in duration.¹³⁵ We have already met one enactment of the Law of Commán, in 793. Two earlier ones are recorded in the annals. ‘The Second Law of Commán and of Áedán’ (the latter being the current abbot of Roscommon, predecessor of the Aildobur of 793) was promulgated among the Three Connachta in 772. The first Law of Commán is not recorded, but the third was promulgated eight years after the second, in 780. There were, therefore, at least four Laws of Commán in the second half of the eighth century. The third Law was said to ‘begin’ (*incipit*) in 780, showing that the promulgation put the law into effect at a particular date.

The earliest evidence for such a repeated promulgation is also the first testimony to an aspect of the eighth-century *cánai* that is almost certainly

¹³⁵ For example, *Cáin Adomnáin*, ed. Meyer, § 47, speaks of banishment ‘until the end of the *rechtge*’; Stacey, *The Road to Judgment*, p. 94, suggests that the *cáin*, and therefore the office of *aitire chána*, would have lasted no longer than the lifetime of the king whose *cáin* it was.

an innovation. In 727 an entry in what, at this date, are still in origin Iona annals declares that 'The relics of Adomnán are taken across to Ireland and the Law is renewed.' This was exactly thirty years since the original promulgation of *Cáin Adomnáin*, a much longer interval than separated the laws of Commán from each other. The original law of Adomnán, that of 697, was called in the annals 'the Law of Innocents' – that is, it was named after the beneficiaries of the law, not after a patron saint such as Columba, or after Adomnán himself. This suggests a different perception of the affair than, for example, 'the Second Law of Commán and Áedán' of 772, when both the patron saint and the current head of his church gave their names to the edict. The entry of 727, however, marks the shift away from a focus upon the beneficiaries to a focus upon the patron saint, for the renewal of the law is associated with the relics of Adomnán. This was then repeated in the first attested 'Law of Patrick': 'A progress of the relics of Peter and Paul and Patrick to give effect to the Law.'¹³⁶ These Armagh relics of the apostles had been mentioned in the Book of the Angel and by Tírechán;¹³⁷ but this was the first occasion when relics had been brought on circuit by Armagh for this purpose. Since Adomnán's relics were in Ireland from 727 until October 730, it is likely that Armagh had imitated Iona.¹³⁸ It may be that the Armagh relics were also on circuit for three years, from 734 until 737. In 737 a meeting was held between Áed Allán, then king of Tara, and Cathal mac Finnguini, king of Munster, at the monastery of Terryglas, close to the frontier. The next entry for that year states that 'The Law of Patrick embraced Ireland.' The meeting may have secured an agreement that Patrick's relics and Patrick's law should cross the border into Munster. In 697 Adomnán had promulgated his law at Birr, another monastery on the border between Munster and Mide, some fourteen miles east of Terryglas. *Cáin Adomnáin*, therefore, both in its original promulgation in 697 and in its renewal in 727, may have offered a model which Armagh was ready to follow.

The Law of Adomnán of 697 and 727 and the Law of Patrick of 734–7 were much wider in scope than the Connaught laws discussed earlier. The latter were, on the available evidence, promulgated at an *óenach* at Crúachain, thus exemplifying the connection between *óenach* and *rechtge* revealed by *Críth Gablach*. The former were all-Ireland edicts, promulgated at special assemblies at monasteries close to or on the boundary between Munster and Mide. In 727, and probably in 734, these

¹³⁶ AU 734.3. ¹³⁷ *Liber Angeli*, c. 19; Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 48.

¹³⁸ Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, p. 63.

promulgations were associated with great circuits of much of Ireland made by relics. The circuit of overkingship, applied to Patrick by Tírechán a generation earlier, was now employed by the keepers of relics: saints, dead to the world yet living friends of God and thus patrons of their clients, would now rule Ireland through their laws and through their relics. Some of this was a long way from the standpoint of Adomnán himself, whose Life of Columba had no truck with the cult of corporeal relics, translated and enshrined, as it was exemplified in the treatment accorded to St Cuthbert at Lindisfarne in 698.¹³⁹ The use of relics to give force to a *cáin* is also attested at provincial level in 811: 'Núadu, abbot of Armagh, travelled to Connaught with the Law of Patrick and with his (relic-)chest.'¹⁴⁰ First introduced in the form of Adomnán's relics in order to renew Adomnán's Law, by 811, if not much earlier, relics could lend power to any *cáin*.

The annals reveal who, in the eighth century, were the principal exponents of the new *cáin* – the edict belonging to a patron saint, often given further power by his relics and normally promulgated by churchman and king in concert. In doing so they raise important questions about the territorial scope of those edicts which were not evidently provincial. The new *cáin* became a relatively common device during the reign of the first Cland Cholmáin king of Tara, Domnall mac Murchada (743–63). Two *cánai* (743 and 748) were associated with a churchman called 'the descendant of Súanach', a description applicable to either an abbot or an anchorite of Rahan near the boundary between Delbnae Bethra and Cenél Fiachach in southern Mide.¹⁴¹ In either case, the *cáin* was named after a living churchman, not a dead saint. The later of the two laws of the descendant of Súanach was said to have been imposed on Leth Cuinn, the northern half of Ireland. In 753 and 757 laws of Columba were promulgated: the named legislator for the first was Domnall, for the second, Slébéne, abbot of Iona. During Domnall's reign, there was one recorded, and almost certainly one unrecorded, promulgation of provincial *cánai*.¹⁴² After Domnall's reign, however, kings of Tara promulgated recorded *cánai* only at the beginning of their reigns, apparently to give further expression to their authority.¹⁴³ By contrast provincial

¹³⁹ On St Cuthbert see above, pp. 341–3; on enshrinement in Ireland, cf. AU 800.6, with Cogitosus' Life of St Brigit, tr. Connolly and Picard, c. 32. ¹⁴⁰ AU 811.1.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 743.7; 748.8; the obits of the two 'descendants of Súanach' are AU 757.1 and 763.2.

¹⁴² AU 744.10 and the unrecorded first Law of Commán and Áedán.

¹⁴³ An apparent exception is the promulgation of the law of Dar Í 'by the Uí Néill', AU 813.8, but this may be (as the unusual phrasing suggests) essentially a provincial *cáin* of the Uí Néill rather than an edict promulgated by the king of Tara. On Dar Í, see P. Ó Riain, 'A Misunderstood Annal: A Hitherto Unnoticed *Cáin*', *Celtica*, 21 (1990), 561–6.

cánai flourished, especially in Connaught but also, to a much lesser extent, in Munster. Among churches, Armagh was the most prominent, notably in association with Cenél nÉogain kings of Tara (737, 767, 806), but also in provincial promulgations in Connaught (783, 799, 825) and Munster (823). Ailbe of Emly and Commán of Roscommon were, as one would expect, the saints of provincial *cánai*, in Munster (793) and Connaught (772, 780, 793) respectively; but so also were Cíarán of Clonmacnois and Brendan of Clonfert and Ardfert (744, 788, 814, all in Connaught).

The principal problem thrown up by the annals is the complete absence of any evidence for provincial *cánai* in either Leinster or Ulster. This is all the more remarkable since a *cáin* was not only an opportunity to display the authority of a provincial king and provincial saints, but could also indicate independence from the king of Tara; we have seen a king of the Connachta promulgating the Law of Patrick during a period when Columba was the favoured saint of the king of Tara.¹⁴⁴ The absence of evidence is unlikely to be accidental: both Leinster and Ulster were better covered by the eighth-century annals than either Connaught or Munster, yet there are twelve recorded *cánai* for Connaught and two for Munster (not counting that of 737). Both in Leinster and in Ulster there were churches which might well have sponsored *cánai*, such as Kildare, Connor, Nendrum and Bangor. An answer to this problem will be proposed below, but not before we have considered more closely how a *cáin* worked, taking as our examples *Cáin Adomnáin* of 697 and *Cáin Domnaig*, a law which relied upon enforcement agents already in existence for *Cáin Phátraic*, the Law of Patrick; it is likely, therefore, to have been a supplementary *cáin* after one or other of the laws of Patrick, of 734–7, 767 or 806. The linguistic evidence favours the eighth rather than the ninth century.

There are, broadly, four elements in the mode of operation of a *cáin*. First, it relies on existing guarantors, especially those provided by a kindred and by lords. Kindreds, for example, appointed spokesmen whose function it was to be channels of communication and power between the public authorities of king, synod and learned orders, on the one hand, and the kindred on the other.¹⁴⁵ Such a representative could be required by public authority to give a pledge to guarantee his kinsmen's good behaviour. Secondly, in addition to these normal guarantors, there were special ones provided to ensure compliance with the

¹⁴⁴ AU 783.9.

¹⁴⁵ *Crith Gablach*, ed. Binchy, on the *aire coisring*: § 20, lines 277–82.

cáin, the *aitirí cána*, ‘hostage-sureties of a *cáin*’.¹⁴⁶ Sometimes at least, perhaps normally, these were appointed for a particular *cáin* and their function lasted no longer than the *cáin* did. They were often of high status: the heir-apparent to a kingdom is cited as someone who would be appointed to be an *aitire* for a *cairde*, ‘treaty’.¹⁴⁷ Some of the named lay guarantors of *Cáin Adomnáin* may have been heirs-apparent;¹⁴⁸ others were kings. Thirdly, there were enforcing officers, persons who collected the penalties for violation of the *cáin*.¹⁴⁹ In the case of *Cáin Domnaig*, they might be appointed by a kindred; *Cáin Domnaig* also made special provision for ‘identifiers’, in effect informers who accused someone of violating sabbatarian regulations against work on Sundays.¹⁵⁰ For *Cáin Adomnáin*, in which the offences were more public, identifiers are not mentioned. Finally, there were special judges appointed to adjudicate cases arising under the *cáin*.¹⁵¹ Just as persons were given special roles to enforce the edict, so also there were special penalties on those who violated its rules. There were *féich cána*, ‘debts of a *cáin*’, and also banishment ‘until the end of the *rechtge*’.¹⁵² The first illustrates the sense in which the whole operation of the *cáin* was a grand contract between the sponsors and the peoples concerned, a contract buttressed by sureties and pledges; the normal penalties were thus ‘debts of the *cáin*’ arising out of violation of agreed terms. The second demonstrates that, in spite of the mention in *Cáin Adomnáin* of a *bithcháin*, ‘perpetual *cáin*’, aspects of it had a limited time-span.¹⁵³

Probably both the mode of enforcing the penalties and some aspects of the penalties themselves were temporary. In *Cáin Adomnáin* it appears that the ‘stewards of the law’, appointed by and responsible to the abbot and community of Iona, collected the entire debt ‘of the *cáin*’ for, say, the killing of a woman. They would then be responsible for paying to the woman’s kindred and lords the compensation owed to them for her death (*fíach erradais*). In the absence of a *cáin*, a woman’s kindred would still be entitled to compensation or to pursue a vendetta if the terms of compensation were not agreed. The prominent role of the sponsors of

¹⁴⁶ *Cáin Adomnáin*, §§ 48, 49, 53; on this figure see Stacey, *The Road to Judgment*, pp. 94–111.

¹⁴⁷ *CIH* 919.40–920. 2, and Stacey, *The Road to Judgment*, pp. 92–3.

¹⁴⁸ For example, Ní Dhonnchadha, ‘The Guarantor List of *Cáin Adomnáin*’, 198–9, argues that Eterscél mac Máile hUmae was not yet king of Munster in 697.

¹⁴⁹ *Rechtairi: Cáin Adomnáin*, § 48.

¹⁵⁰ *Cáin Domnaig*, ed. Hull, *Ériu*, 20 (1966), pp. 160–77, at §§ 2, 3, 5.

¹⁵¹ *Cáin Adomnáin*, ed. Meyer, § 37.

¹⁵² The *féich cána* appear to be contrasted with *féich erradais* in *Cáin Adomnáin*, ed. Meyer, § 40; the latter were paid to a person’s lords and kinsmen; *Cáin Domnaig*, ed. Hull, § 2; for banishment until the end of the *rechtge* see *Cáin Adomnáin*, § 47.

¹⁵³ *Bithcháin*: *ibid.*, § 34.

the *cáin* and their agents in collecting debts for violation of the terms did not annul the rights of a kindred or a lord. What it did mean was that the sponsors of the *cáin* and their agents had a duty to collect compensation on behalf of lord and kindred. Even without a *cáin*, this might be done by a king or other powerful figure on behalf of the injured party, but the enforcer could then collect 'the third of enforcement', that is, take a third part of the compensation. In *Cáin Adomnáin* the community of Iona was entitled to a *forbach*, 'additional mulct', as well as 'the debts of *cáin*'.¹⁵⁴ The sponsoring authority thus benefited financially by the operation of the *cáin*, but also the victims may have been better off if they did not need to pay a 'third of enforcement' to a local lord or king. One thing that the *cáin* did, therefore, was to replace the ordinary processes of feud with its own means of enforcing compensation. A similar policy of intervening in the feud is implicit in the other penalty, that of banishment, since it had the effect of removing from the district the person on whom vengeance might be taken. The aggrieved kindred, instructed by the terms of the *cáin* to accept compensation rather than take vengeance, would be much less likely to take the law into their own hands if the object of their hatred were removed from the kingdom. A system of compensation enforced by 'stewards of the law' and banishment of the offender were thus complementary devices: banishment made vengeance less tempting, leaving the field clear for the system of compensation prescribed by the *cáin* and organised by 'the stewards of the law'. Banishment, however, was only available within the area governed by the *cáin* and 'until the end of the *rechtge*'; and it may well be that the system of collecting 'the debts of the *cáin*' was equally temporary.

What is remarkable about *Cáin Adomnáin* is the way it mobilised the whole of Ireland and Pictland to secure a conscious innovation, protection for non-combatants, whether women, children or clerics. This was not just a measure to secure protection for those who were expected not to fight in war; the rules applied just as much in times and areas of peace as they did in war. The fundamental strategy was that, while it was necessary in a sinful world to accept that violence would be inflicted in war and feud, and even inflicted rightly, only those who might themselves inflict non-judicial violence might have such violence inflicted on them: lay males after the period of childhood. Only in part was *Cáin Adomnáin* an early medieval 'Geneva convention'; it also sought to restrict the scope of violence throughout society, in peace as much as in war. The framework may have been temporary, but it was clearly intended to

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., § 43.

effect permanent change: hence the talk of a 'perpetual edict'.¹⁵⁵ It was presumably hoped that the protection of non-combatants would become accepted custom, enforced by the normal processes of compensation backed up by the threat of feud. 'The end of the edict' would then be the end of a mode of enforcement, not the end of a rule of law.

(VII) THE POWER OF THE UÍ NÉILL IN THE EIGHTH CENTURY

Adomnán could mobilise Ireland because his kinsman, Loingsech mac Óengusa, was king of Tara. He could bring the king of the Picts, Bride son of Derile, behind the edict, because Iona was revered as the resting-place of the apostle to the Picts. The means by which the edict was promulgated was a quite exceptional *rígdál*, 'royal meeting', on the border between Munster and the lands of the Uí Néill. This was combined with an exceptional synod, apparently in joint session. Adomnán himself appears to have described the meeting as 'the Irish synod'.¹⁵⁶ Provincial *cánaí* were probably commoner; yet, as we have seen, not one is attested for Leinster or Ulster. This raises the possibility that there were, in effect, three provinces for the purpose of the *cáin*: Munster, the Connachta and a Leth Cuinn, 'Conn's Half', that did not include the Connachta. We have seen that, in the early ninth century, Leinster kings might attend an *óenach* within the lands of the Uí Néill. Moreover, this occurred during the reign of perhaps the weakest king of Tara for a hundred years. We have also seen that the synods of the Uí Néill and the Leinstermen might meet together, as they did in 780 at Tara. In 859 Osraige, historically part of Munster, would be alienated to 'Conn's Half' at another royal meeting at a major monastery, a transaction effected by a formal contract made between the kings of Munster and Tara and buttressed by sureties.¹⁵⁷ In spite of the oddity of a Conn's Half embracing a good two thirds of Ireland, therefore, we cannot rule out in principle the possibility of a Leth Cuinn that, for at least some purposes, included Leinster, Ulster, the Airgíalla and the lands of the Uí Néill.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., § 34.

¹⁵⁶ VSC ii.45 (and see Sharpe's n. 341 to his translation, *Adomnán of Iona: Life of St Columba*, pp. 346-7).

¹⁵⁷ AU 859.3 (where 'ad-rogaídh Mael Gualai, ri Muman, a dílsi' means 'Máel Gúala appointed [sureties for] its alienation' rather than 'warranted the alienation').

¹⁵⁸ Leth Cuinn excludes Ulster in AU 851.6, a royal meeting at Armagh including two contingents from both the laity and the clergy: the laity were the nobles of Leth Cuinn and those of the Ulaid; the clergy were 'the congregation of Patrick' and the clerics 'of Mide', led by the abbots of Armagh and Clonard respectively. It should be noted that Leth Cuinn would have included much of 'the congregation of Patrick'. The lay and ecclesiastical divisions did not correspond.

Whether this theoretical possibility was ever a reality is difficult to say. Two considerations, however, give the idea some weight: the pattern of warfare in the eighth century and the notions of national identity current at the same period.

In the period after the Viking wars, the secular history of Ireland was dominated by the wars of the great provincial monarchies. The achievement of *Brían Bórama* was to demonstrate the fragility of *Uí Néill* hegemony and thus to dangle the prospect of domination before his own province and also the other provinces of Leinster and Connaught. The normal pattern of warfare in the seventh and eighth centuries was quite different: most violence was between, and even within, various branches of the *Uí Néill*. Apart from *Uí Néill* fighting *Uí Néill*, the other conflicts of consequence stemmed, first, from attempts by *Cenél Coirpri* and *Cenél Conaill* to extend their territories in north-eastern Connaught, an ambition that led to disastrous defeat in 703 at the battle of *Corann*; secondly, the *Ulaids* were decisively defeated at the battle of *Fochart* in 735; thirdly, *Cenél nÉogain* kings of *Tara* made major attacks on Leinster; and, finally, in the last quarter of the eighth century the borders between the *Uí Néill* and Munster saw increasingly serious conflict. All this left the *Shannon* frontier between the southern *Uí Néill* and the *Connachta* in a state of more or less unbroken peace throughout the eighth century. The frontier between the *Uí Néill* and Munster was almost equally peaceful until, first, the great churches of the borderlands became embroiled in conflict, and, secondly, until *Donnchad mac Domnaill*, of *Cland Cholmáin*, became the champion of Leinster against Munster. This did not happen until the last quarter of the eighth century.¹⁵⁹

As for Leinster's borders in the eighth century, there is a sharp contrast between the aggressive policy pursued by the first two *Cenél nÉogain* kings of *Tara* in the period, *Fergal mac Maíle Dúin* and his elder son *Áed Allán*, and the generally peaceable stance adopted by the *Cland Cholmáin* kings, *Domnall mac Murchada* and *Donnchad mac Domnaill*.¹⁶⁰ The younger brother of *Áed Allán*, *Níall Frossach*, seems to have refrained from any major attack on Leinster, but his son, *Áed Oirdnide*, was just as aggressive in the early ninth century as his uncle and grandfather had been in the first half of the eighth.¹⁶¹ This contrast

¹⁵⁹ See below, pp. 593–6.

¹⁶⁰ AU 721.8; 722.8; 738.4. *Donnchad* attacked Leinster in 780 (AU 780.7), but the Leinstermen had earlier been allied to him (AU 777.3) and would later assist them against the Munstermen (AU 794.6), when the king of Leinster was his brother-in-law (AU 795.1).

¹⁶¹ AU 804.5, 10; 805.7; 818.6; 819.1.

between Cland Cholmáin and Cenél nÉogain in policy towards Leinster may have some bearing on their rise to power within the Uí Néill.

After the battle of Mag Roth in 637, the rest of the seventh century saw a domination of much of Ireland by the victors in that battle, Cenél Conaill and Síl nÁeda Sláne. In the middle years of the century these two branches of the Uí Néill may have remained allies, but by the time Tírechán was writing, *c.* 690, towards the end of the reign of Fínsnechtae Fledach, he could write as if the hegemony of Síl nÁeda Sláne was secure.¹⁶² His antipathy to Cenél Coirpri, allies of Cenél Conaill, shows his partisan stance.¹⁶³ Cenél Coirpri ruled a territory adjacent to Cenél Conaill in the north-east of Co. Sligo, but also northern Tethbae and a small kingdom on the Leinster border (which gave its name to the village of Carbury).¹⁶⁴ These scattered territories may have been essential to the exercise of power by Cenél Conaill kings of Tara in the midlands. This would explain why Cenél Coirpri continued to be the object of hostile propaganda more than a century after they had ceased themselves to be contenders for the kingship of Tara. In the north the hegemony of Cenél Conaill in the middle and late seventh century was assured by a feud within Cenél nÉogain.¹⁶⁵

From the 730s onwards until the tenth century, this older political pattern was replaced by another. In the midlands power shifted westwards, from Brega to Mide; in the north it shifted eastwards, from Cenél Conaill to Cenél nÉogain.

In the midlands the principal agent of change was the 'kin-slaying' of Síl nÁeda Sláne, a feud within a kindred. The main phase of the feud began in 712 with the killing of Maine mac Néill, a member of the Uí Chernaig, the branch of Síl nÁeda Sláne that ruled southern Brega. His slayer was Flann mac Áeda of Síl nDlúthaig, the branch that ruled part of northern Brega. Flann was killed two years later; but the feud was given a further twist when Flann's brother and a cousin, Amolngaid mac Conaing, were killed in 718 in the battle of Kells by Maine's uncle, Conall Grant. This allowed the current king of Tara, Fergal mac Maíle Dúin of Cenél nÉogain, to intervene two months later and to kill Conall Grant in battle. In spite of this intervention, the feud continued, with further killings in 724 and 737. Thereby the Uí Chernaig, already distinct from their northern cousins of the Uí Chonaing and Síl nDlúthaig, moved into settled opposition to them. Moreover, the Uí Chernaig

¹⁶² For example, in Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 17, Brega and Mide are the lands of the Uí Néill, while Ráith Airthir is, by implication, seen as the royal seat of the dominant lineage within the Uí Néill, cc. 9–10. ¹⁶³ Ibid., 9. ¹⁶⁴ See above, p. 20. ¹⁶⁵ See above, pp. 495–6.

themselves divided into two sub-branches, probably centred on two distinct royal seats, Loch nGabor and Calatruim.¹⁶⁶ Such segmentation into distinct branches was normal in Irish dynasties. What was, however, damaging to the interests of *Síl nÁeda Sláne* was that feud did not lead to the elimination of any of the branches involved but only to a fatal hardening of their divisions.¹⁶⁷

Their rivals, Cland Cholmáin of Mide, had survived an earlier kin-feud in the first three decades of the seventh century and were waiting to profit by any weakness within *Síl nÁeda Sláne*. Murchad 'of Mide' was killed in 715, three years before Fergal mac Maíle Dúin marched into Brega to punish the *Uí Chernaig* for the battle of Kells. Unfortunately we do not know who killed him, but at his death the annalist termed him 'king of the *Uí Néill*'.¹⁶⁸ It was argued in the previous chapter that this title was used for 'deputy kings' of the Southern *Uí Néill*.¹⁶⁹ In other words, when the king of Tara was of the Northern *Uí Néill*, a king from one of the southern *Uí Néill* dynasties was chosen by the king of Tara to wield some of his authority in the midlands. Similarly, when the king of Tara was himself from the midlands, a 'king of the North' might exercise some authority over the Northern *Uí Néill* and possibly the *Airgíalla*.¹⁷⁰ This authority may have included the right to go on circuit in the area concerned. What is striking about Murchad is that Fergal mac Maíle Dúin, as king of Tara, should have delegated power to a king of Mide and thus to the head of Cland Cholmáin, rather than to a ruler from *Síl nÁeda Sláne*, till then the more powerful dynasty. The effect was to give Cland Cholmáin a position of authority throughout the midlands just at the time when *Síl nÁeda Sláne* was getting deeper into its internal feuding.

Cenél nEogain's rise to power at the expense of Cenél Conaill, so that it became henceforward the leading dynasty of 'the north', cannot be so easily explained by internal weaknesses; instead, an exceptionally able

¹⁶⁶ The two branches were descended from two sons of the eponymous Cernach, Níall and Conall Grant; of their descendants, all kings of Loch nGabor seem to have been descendants of Níall, and Calatruim appears to have been associated with *Síl Conaill* Grint: see *CGH* i.160–1; AU 842.5; 846.4. Máel Dúin mac Conaill, king of Calatruim, may be a son of Conall mac Néill maic Conaill Grint, king of Southern Brega, *ob.* 815; cf. also AU 777.2. It looks as though, when members of the *Uí Chernaig* were kings of Southern Brega, that is what they were called, but when they were merely kings of their respective branches, they were kings of Loch nGabor or Calatruim as the case might be. Calatruim is identified with Galtrim, cf. Galtrim House at N 86 52; Loch nGabor is Lagore at N 99 53; the first mention of a king of Loch nGabor is AU 786.6.

¹⁶⁷ For example, Donnchad mac Domnaill's ability to pick them off separately: he began with the *Uí Chonaing* of northern Brega, AU 777.6; 778.1; the turn of the *Uí Chernaig* came later, AU 786.6. ¹⁶⁸ AU 715.2. ¹⁶⁹ Above, pp. 479–80. ¹⁷⁰ AU 779.10; 788.1.

military leader, Áed Allán, the elder son of Fergal mac Maile Dúin, was largely responsible. He devoted three years to conquering the kingdom of Mag nÍtha.¹⁷¹ This territory occupied a pivotal position in the assemblage of lands held by Cenél Conaill in the north-west, connecting the lands on the northern coast, close to Lough Swilly, with Tír nÁeda, the leading kingdom around Donegal Town.¹⁷² In 733 the last king of Tara from Cenél Conaill, Flaithbertach mac Loingsig, even brought a fleet from Scottish Dál Riata across to Ireland, but it achieved nothing. After a further defeat in Mag nÍtha in 734, Flaithbertach apparently abdicated, became a cleric and eventually died in 765.¹⁷³

The abilities of Áed Allán as a military leader were further demonstrated by his victory at Fochart in 735, the year immediately after his last victory over Flaithbertach and his accession to the kingship of Tara.¹⁷⁴ Having probably completed the conquest of Mag nÍtha in 734, he conquered Conailli Muirthemne by means of his victory at Fochart the next year (see map 7, The North-East). This battle was the only serious conflict between the Uí Néill and the Ulaid in the eighth century, and it was also decisive. Áed Rón, king of Ulster, was killed and the Conailli Muirthemne became subject to Cenél nÉogain: Muirthemne became the principal base for Cenél nÉogain on the east coast.

The power of Cenél nÉogain over Conailli Muirthemne can be illustrated from a variety of sources. When, in 756, Domnall mac Murchada, then king of Tara, wished to repel the challenge posed by Áed Allán's younger brother, Níall Frossach, he summoned an army from Leinster to attack Muirthemne.¹⁷⁵ In the Life of Daig mac Cairill, the patron saint of Inis Caín Dega, one of the main churches of the kingdom, Daig is said to have belonged to the Cíannachta; but in the Genealogies of the Saints he is attached to Cenél nÉogain, thus giving them the rights over the church enjoyed by 'the kindred of the patron saint', *fine érlama*.¹⁷⁶ Although, therefore, the old dynasty of Conailli Muirthemne continued almost as if nothing had happened,¹⁷⁷ their new overlords of Cenél nÉogain could exercise power though control of church lands and church clients. In the royal genealogies Conailli Muirthemne were largely portrayed as an Ulster people. Any change here was unlikely to succeed, since all Ireland knew that Mag Muirthemne was the home of Cú Chulainn, the Irish Achilles and the saviour of Ulster.

After 735 Cenél nÉogain had a firm grip on the Airgíalla between the

¹⁷¹ AU 732.10; 733.3; 734.8. ¹⁷² See Map 6, above, p. 52.

¹⁷³ AU 765.2.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 735.2. ¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 756.3.

¹⁷⁶ CGSH § 19; contrast *Vita S. Dagaiei*, c. 1 (ed. Heist, *Vitae*, p. 389).

¹⁷⁷ AU 741.1; 789.3; 824.8.

Foyle basin to the north-west – their own homelands – and Conailli Muirthemne to the south-east. The effect was to accentuate the division of Leth Cuinn between Mide (to which Brega was now normally subject) and the North, *ind Fochlae*. When, in 771, Donnchad mac Domnaill challenged Niall Frossach, then king of Tara, the annalist succinctly records the event as ‘a hosting by Donnchad into the North’.¹⁷⁸ When Donnchad’s father, Domnall mac Murchada, defeated Níall Frossach’s elder brother, Áed Allán, at the battle of Serethmag in 743, not only was Áed Allán killed but so also were the kings of the Airthir, of the Uí Chremthainn and of Uí Thuirtri, leading kingdoms among the Airgíalla.¹⁷⁹ The kings of Mide, too, had their counterparts to the Airgíalla, normally dependable client-kings who would form their armies in war and entertain their households in peace: the kings of Cenél Lógairi, the Luigni and Gailenga of Mide, Delbnae Assail and Cíannacht Breg. In some cases the division between Mide and the North led to splitting of kingdoms. The Uí Moccu Úais of western Mide and of Brega were divided from their cousins, the Uí Moccu Úais who constituted the northern branch of the Airgíalla.¹⁸⁰ The Maugdornai were split into three kingdoms by *c.* 800: the Maugdornai Maigen around Donaghmoyne,¹⁸¹ their close neighbours, the Fir Roiss,¹⁸² and the Maugdornai Breg.¹⁸³ In these cases, the southern kingdoms, Uí Moccu Úais Midi, Uí Moccu Úais Breg and Maugdornai Breg, may all have formed part of the overkingdom ruled by the Cland Cholmáin kings, while the northern kingdoms, the Uí Moccu Úais of the north and Maugdornai Maigen, looked to Cenél nÉogain.

In this new alternation between Cland Cholmáin and Cenél nÉogain, Leinster usually occupied a paradoxical position, as an important ally of Cland Cholmáin but the favourite military target of Cenél nÉogain. The new pattern was set by Fergal mac Maíle Dúin in 719–22. In 715 Cellach Cúalann had died, the last of the Uí Máil kings of Leinster, to

¹⁷⁸ This entry suggests that the usual date implied for Niall Frossach’s abdication in the king-lists, 770, is too early.

¹⁷⁹ AU 743.4 (the normal convention was to list the principal kings slain on the defeated side).

¹⁸⁰ See Walsh, *Place names of Westmeath*, p. 297, who rejects O’Donovan’s suggestion that the Uí Moccu Úais of Brega (AU 838.4; 839.5) were in the barony of Moyfenrath; their territory contained Cell Sinche (> Kilshine parish, near Castletownpatrick, north of Navan). The Uí Moccu Úais Midi gave their name to the barony of Moygoish, Co. Westmeath; their territory included Kilbixy (*Fél.*² Notes, 4 October; N 32 61), still a parish within the barony, which suggests that it does indeed, unlike some other baronies, approximately reflect the early medieval kingdom.

¹⁸¹ AU 802.6; *VT*² 2131–2, 2138. Donaghmoyne is Domnach Maigen, H 85 o6.

¹⁸² Cell Roiss > Carrickmacross, H 84 o3; *VT*² 2142–5, and cf. 1159–60 (contrast Adomnán, *VSC* i.43).

¹⁸³ AU 821.3.

be succeeded by Murchad mac Brain of Uí Dúnlainge. Cellach's sons challenged Murchad in 719 but Áed mac Cellaig was killed in the battle. To the north of the Liffey, Fergal mac Maíle Dúin had disciplined the feuding Uí Néill of Brega in 718. His way was thus open to attack Leinster, and the harrying expeditions began in 719.¹⁸⁴ Fergal's achievement appeared evident by 721: 'Fergal harries Leinster and the cow-tribute and the base-clientship of the Leinstermen to Fergal are bound by sureties.'¹⁸⁵ Probably because of the technical legal terms used, this entry was written in Irish rather than the usual Latin of the annals at this period. What it states is that a formal contract had been imposed upon the Leinstermen by which they were compelled to accept the position of base-clients. Such a situation was deeply injurious to their political standing: base-clientship was the normal condition of non-noble commoners – *aithig* as opposed to *airig* – and likewise the obligation to pay tribute was a mark of an *aithechthúath*. Fergal's humiliation of the Leinstermen only lasted for one year, until the battle of Allen in 722, when he and many of his client-kings were killed by Murchad mac Brain. Yet, though Fergal's immediate achievement was so brief, and his defeat became a matter of saga for the Leinstermen, it set the pattern of Cenél nÉogain policy for the next century.¹⁸⁶

In 738, three years after his defeat of the Ulstermen at Fochart, Áed Allán secured a complete revenge for his father's defeat and death. In the battle of Áth Senaig, the king of Leinster, Áed mac Colgen, was killed. He was of the Uí Chennselaig and thus not of the same kindred as Murchad mac Brain, the victor at the battle of Allen in 722; but Murchad's son, Bran, was among those slain. Moreover, the victory at Áth Senaig was ascribed to 'the descendants of Conn', rather than to the Uí Néill as such, thus emphasising the solidarity between Cenél nÉogain and the Airgíalla.¹⁸⁷

In another five years, in 743, Áed Allán was dead, killed in battle by Domnall mac Murchada of Míde at the battle of Serethmag. Domnall seems to have treated the Leinstermen quite differently, mounting no great harrying expeditions into Mag Lifi. Instead, as we have seen, he was able to summon a Leinster army in 756 to attack Mag Muirthemne. The only repeated attacks on Leinster in the period were by Anmchad

¹⁸⁴ AT 719.

¹⁸⁵ For the textual complexities of this entry see the note to T. M. Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland*, Liverpool Translated Texts (forthcoming), s.a.

¹⁸⁶ *Cath Almaine*, ed. Ó Riain, includes a discussion of the relationship of the saga to the annals.

¹⁸⁷ See above, pp. 511–12.

mac Con Cerae, king of Osraige, and these were probably mainly directed against the Uí Bairrche and Uí Chennselaig kingdoms in what is now Co. Carlow.¹⁸⁸ Although, to judge by the annals, these Osraige attacks were the most sustained military activity of the middle years of the century, between 743 and 770, they were not directed against the Uí Dúnlainge of Mag Lifi, now pre-eminent in Leinster, but against their rivals and clients further south.

The policy towards Leinster of Domnall's son, Donnchad, is more difficult to fathom. His predecessor, Níall Frossach of Cenél nÉogain, was a comparatively old man when he became king of Tara in 763 (he was probably forty-five). He was to die on Iona in 778, having already resigned the kingship.¹⁸⁹ According to the Middle Irish king-lists, Níall Frossach only reigned seven years as king of Tara, 763–70.¹⁹⁰ The notion that he abdicated in 770 may be derived from an annal entry recording the first of Donnchad's two attacks on the Leinstermen:

An encounter between Donnchad mac Domnaill and Cellach mac Dúnochada; and Donnchad went with the army of the Uí Néill against the Leinstermen, and the Leinstermen fled from him and went to Scé Nechtain; and the Uí Néill remained for three days in Ráith Alinne and burnt all the borderlands [?] of the Leinstermen with fire.¹⁹¹

If the Uí Néill of this entry were all the Uí Néill, Donnchad should already have been king of Tara and this might have been an inaugural *crech ríge*, 'royal prey'. Another view, however, is possible. Donnchad's grandfather and probably his father (towards the beginning of his reign in Mide) were 'kings of the Uí Néill', meaning that they were deputy kings of the southern Uí Néill. The Uí Néill of this entry for 770, therefore, may similarly have been the Uí Néill of the midlands.¹⁹² By this date the annalist was no longer situated on Iona but was himself writing in a church in the midlands: he was thus more likely to refer to the southern Uí Néill as, simply, the Uí Néill. Moreover, the context in 770 was one of civil war among the Leinstermen: earlier the same year Cellach mac Dúnochada had defeated a challenge to his kingship,¹⁹³ and there had also been dynastic conflict among the Uí Chennselaig of southern Leinster.¹⁹⁴ The sequence to these struggles among the Leinstermen was

¹⁸⁸ AT 750, 759, 761. They are likely to have been centred on the Bélat Gabráin, Gowran Pass, Co. Kilkenny, between Uí Bairrche Tire and Osraige: see AU 761.3 and also 754.7 (the Fothairt Feae were neighbours of the Uí Bairrche Tire and branches of Uí Chennselaig), but cf. *ibid.*, 742.2 for an earlier attack on the Cenél Fiachach and Delbnae [Bethra] of southern Mide; also AT 750.

¹⁸⁹ AU 778; *LL* i.97 (lines 3099–100).

¹⁹⁰ 'The Laud Synchronisms', ed. Meyer, 480; *LL* 3109; Gilla Cóemáin, *ibid.*, 15309–10; *CGH* i.125. ¹⁹¹ AU 770.8. ¹⁹² Cf. Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 17. ¹⁹³ AU 770.4. ¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 770.7.

a general outbreak of warfare along the frontier between the Uí Néill and the Leinstermen. The Cíannacht (ruled by the Uí Chonaing) defeated the Uí Théig of Cúalu, recently contenders for the kingship of Leinster, at Áth Cliath, but the Uí Chernaig, rulers of southern Brega, were defeated at Bolgg Boinne.¹⁹⁵ Donnchad's expedition to Ráith Alinne was different from these battles fought by the two main branches of Síl nÁeda Sláne. They were frontier engagements, but Donnchad had penetrated into the interior of Leinster. Ráith Alinne was the Tara of Leinster, a prehistoric site made into a royal seat, a *ciuitas regalis*.¹⁹⁶

The best interpretation of Donnchad's attack on the Uí Dúnlainge in 770 is that he was exploiting a severe but temporary weakness in order to demonstrate his claims to be the next king of Tara. 'The descendants of Conn' – the northern Uí Néill and the Airgíalla – might glory in their victory at Áth Senaig in 738; now the southern Uí Néill had camped in the traditional 'royal fortress' of Leinster and had faced no challenge. As for Níall Frossach, Donnchad's expeditions 'into the north' in 771 and 772 showed the ambitions and the strength of the king of Mide without necessarily dislodging his predecessor as king of Tara or bringing him to battle. Even among the southern Uí Néill Donnchad's authority was not yet complete in 770. To be an acknowledged king of Tara, he needed to bring Síl nÁeda Sláne, the Uí Néill of Brega, to heel. This was not finally achieved until 778, after the death, earlier in the same year, of Níall Frossach.

The pattern of events in the annals suggests that Níall Frossach abdicated at some date between 772 and 777, leaving Donnchad as the obvious claimant to the succession. Donnchad was, however, opposed by Síl nÁeda Sláne, principally by Congalach mac Conaing, king of north Brega. Donnchad's campaign against the Uí Néill of Brega opened after ill-timed conflict among those to be attacked: a battle between two of the Uí Chernaig left a vassal ruler and others dead in the precinct of Calatruim, one of their royal seats, and Donnchad promptly brought a Leinster army north to attack Brega.¹⁹⁷ The Uí Chernaig, divided and ruled by an old man, Níall mac Conaill Graint, offered no real

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 770.9–10. The annalist did not say who defeated the Uí Chernaig; it may have been Donnchad himself, on his way home from Leinster.

¹⁹⁶ *CGH* i.20; see above, pp. 146–8.

¹⁹⁷ AU 777.2: Échtgus mac Baíth was king of the Déissi Breg, brother of Níallgus mac Baíth (*ob.* 758), for whom see *CGH* i.168 (145 b 45). Calatruim was probably the seat of Níall mac Conaill Graint; his opponent, Cummuscach, was probably Cummuscach mac Fogartaig who would die in *clericatu* and in extreme old age in 797. The descendants of Fogartach appear to have been kings of Loch nGabor, while Síl Conaill Graint had their seat at Calatruim: see above, n. 166.

resistance.¹⁹⁸ Donnchad then went on, still in 777, to attack the Uí Chonaing of north Brega. The first challenge came at the *óenach*, presumably that of Tailtiu, in the midst of a summer of gales and heavy rain. Conflict continued into 778, when Congalach mac Conaing was defeated and killed.¹⁹⁹ Later in 778, after much successful warfare, Donnchad displayed a proper regard for peace and his own authority by combining with Bresal, abbot of Iona, to promulgate the Law of Columba.

If, in 770, Donnchad attacked Leinster for just the same reason as he attacked Brega later, namely to establish, within the dominions of the Uí Néill, an impregnable claim to succeed Níall Frossach, his attack in 780 may have been for family reasons. Donnchad's sister Eithne was married to Bran mac Muiredaig, who would succeed Rúaidrí mac Fáeláin in 785. Bran, however, had ambitions to shoulder his cousin aside. These were to lead to his imprisonment in 782 after a battle at the Curragh had led to the death of a king of the Uí Fáilgi and a brother of the king of the Uí Chennselaig in single combat. In 780, therefore, Donnchad may well have been intervening in a way calculated to favour his brother-in-law. Once Bran was installed as king in 785, there was complete peace between the Uí Néill and the Leinstermen. In 794 Donnchad led an Uí Néill army to help the Leinstermen defeat the Munstermen. By then, however, he was over sixty years old,²⁰⁰ and the murder of his brother-in-law Bran on 6 May 795 was the beginning of the collapse in his authority.²⁰¹ The murder was both kinslaying (the killer was the son of one of Bran's first cousins) and a ruthless political gesture: the queen, Eithne, Donnchad's sister, was killed with her husband in the sanctuary of a church. Leinster, therefore – or at least the northern Leinster of the Uí Dúnlainge, rulers of Mag Lifi and kings of the province – was part of the structure of Donnchad's power: he could deploy a Leinster army against old enemies in Brega, and when his power began to crumble this started in a church in Leinster with the murder of his sister.

For both Cland Cholmáin and Cenél nÉogain kings of Tara, policies towards Leinster shaped the character of their reigns. But in the course of the eighth century these policies became very different. Why Fergal mac Maíle Dúin pursued a harsh line towards Leinster is unclear. While he was still only king of Cenél nÉogain, he was an ally of Cenél Conaill,

¹⁹⁸ CGH i.160.

¹⁹⁹ AU 786.6 records a later battle between Donnchad and Síl nÁeda Sláne, but it appears to have been punishment meted out by Donnchad for the killing of the abbot of Tuilén (786.5).

²⁰⁰ He was born in 733 (AU 733.6). ²⁰¹ Ibid., 795.1.

and his policy may have owed something to an earlier Cenél Conaill feud with Leinster. More generally, it presumably grew out of the tradition that control of the midlands derived ultimately from the conquests of the sons of Níall in the years around 500; and, since Cenél nÉogain were based far from the midlands, theirs had to be the more aggressive stance. The origins of the policy may be unclear; what is evident is the way it developed towards a further expression of the dual hegemony of Cland Cholmáin and Cenél nÉogain. Fergal mac Maíle Dúin lost his life in battle against the Leinstermen and was avenged by his elder son, Áed Allán. Domnall mac Murchada, however, developed an alliance with the Uí Dúnlainge allowing him to use a Leinster army against Níall Frossach.

The legends current in the eighth century about the origins of the Connachta and the Éoganachta were entirely consistent with the character of Uí Néill domination.²⁰² Munster and Connaught were allies of the Uí Néill in legend as much as in current policy. The Airgíalla were favoured clients, adopted by genealogical fiction into 'the descendants of Conn'. The Ulstermen and Leinstermen were at first distinct peoples, not part of the network of lineages enjoying hegemony in Ireland.²⁰³ A legend was created, however, which, significantly, attached the Leinstermen to the ancestors of the Uí Néill and the Connachta rather than to the ancestors of the Éoganachta.²⁰⁴

At the beginning of the eighth century it was still possible to think of an Irish people of diverse origins. The unity of the Irish, claimed the *Primer of the Poets*, *Auraicept na nÉces*, lay in a unity of language, not a unity of race.²⁰⁵ Indeed, this language was peculiarly excellent among the languages of the world: the rest were the fruits of pride, agents of division to punish the sin of the Tower of Babel. Although Irish was invented at the Tower, its origins were ten years after the dispersal of peoples which took place when God divided the human race into many languages. Irish, then, did not originate in the sin of pride which led to the building of the Tower. It was not part of God's plan to confound the presumption of the human race. Irish was invented by Fénius Farsaid in a school; and the method of its invention was this: Fénius extracted what was best from the existing languages of the world. Moreover, not only was Irish therefore the best of languages – not only did it have, so to say,

²⁰² *Scéla Éogain 7 Cormaic*, ed. Ó Cathasaigh, *The Heroic Biography of Cormac mac Airt*, pp. 119–27; ed. and tr., together with *Cath Mucraime* and *Scéla Mošauluim*, in Ó Daly, *Cath Maige Mucrama*.

²⁰³ Binchy, 'The Saga of Fergus mac Léti', § 1 (text, p. 37; tr. p. 39).

²⁰⁴ *Orgain Denna Ríg in Fingal Rónáin and Other Stories*, ed. Greene, pp. 18–23; Dillon, *The Cycles of the Kings*, pp. 4–10. ²⁰⁵ *Auraicept na nÉces*, ed. Ahlqvist, p. 47.

an immaculate conception – but it was invented in a school and for a school: when Féníus was living by Nimrod's Tower, identified with the Tower of Babel and placed in Egypt, he was asked by his school 'to extract a language out of the many languages'. The *Auraicept* is a notable enemy of racialism: when the dispersal took place from the Tower of Babel, 'it was everyone who spoke the same language that went from there to his own territory, and not everyone of the same descent'.²⁰⁶ The origin of Irish national identity was thus declared to be a language, indeed the best of languages, a language of a school. Since Féníus was a student of many languages, and since the subject of the *Auraicept* was grammar, the school in question was that of the grammarian. Irish identity was a matter of the letters of the ogam alphabet, of genders and declensions.

Since the Irish, in spite of their passion for genealogy, were not yet universally thought to be descended from one ancestor, there could be distinct *cenéla* – here 'races' in the sense of peoples thought to be unified by common descent. In 'The Saga of Fergus mac Léti' there were three 'free races' in Ireland: the Ulaid, the Laigin (Gailni or Gaileóin) and the Féni.²⁰⁷ The Féni were in both cultural and political terms dominant: the native law, *Fénechas*, was their law; and in the *Auraicept*, the fictional inventor of that peculiarly excellent Irish language was Féníus (the Féni given a Latin singular ending *-us* to dress him up as a grammarian of the remote past).²⁰⁸ Moreover, the two ruling *gentes*, Connachta (here including the Uí Néill) and Éoganachta, both belonged to the Féni. Excluded from the Féni, however, were not just the other two 'free races', the Ulstermen and the Leinstermen, but also the Érainn, represented for purposes of ethnic identity by the hero Mac Con mac Luigdech.

The cycle of stories about Mac Con, Éogan Már (ancestor of the Éoganachta), Art mac Cuinn (ancestor of the Connachta and the Uí Néill), and the latter's son, Cormac mac Airt, are a political parable.²⁰⁹ They employ many widely attested motifs of what has been termed 'the Heroic Biography', the standard life-cycle of the hero;²¹⁰ but, in characteristic Irish style, they combine international motifs with specific details about persons who, in their descendants, were of current political importance in the eighth century.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 47, § 1. 4. ²⁰⁷ Above, n. 203.

²⁰⁸ On Féníus, see J. Carey, 'The Ancestry of Féníus Farsaid', *Celtica*, 21 (1990), 104–12.

²⁰⁹ Ó Corráin, Review of Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, *Celtica*, 157, gives good reasons for rejecting the historicity of Cormac mac Airt.

²¹⁰ Summarized by Ó Cathasaigh, *The Heroic Biography of Cormac mac Airt*, pp. 104–6.

In these stories kings were not necessarily important in themselves, but rather in their capacity to pass on royal blood to their descendants. Thus prophecies declared that the offspring of Éogan Már and Art mac Cuinn would rule for ever in spite of the unpromising fates of both ancestor figures. Éogan and Art were allies in a battle fought against Mac Con at Mag Mucrama, situated in Connaught: the latter was victorious and both Éogan and Art were killed. In versions of the story told from the standpoint of the allies, ancestors of the Éoganachta and the Connachta, force prevailed over legitimacy at the battle of Mag Mucrama. That it did not triumph in the end was entirely due to some last-minute sexual activity by the two allies on the night before the battle. Both Éogan and Art were childless and their lines faced extinction. Both were fortunate enough to meet a host for the night before the battle who had both a fertile daughter and a gift of prophecy enabling him to know that the descendants of Éogan (or Art) and his daughter would be kings till Doomsday.

In both cases associations with the birth and rearing of the children born of these unions, Cormac mac Airt and Fiachu Munlethan, established claims to alliances in the eighth century.²¹¹ The father of Éogan Mór's consort was Triath of the Crecraige and 'that is why it is wrong for any man of the Éoganachta to slay a man of the Crecraige'.²¹² For Cormac mac Airt, the model king of Tara, what was crucial was fosterage. Having been, like Romulus and Remus, nurtured for a time by a she-wolf, he was found by a hunter, Luigne Fer Trí. The latter's name represents the Luigni of the midlands and of Connaught together with the associated Corcu Fíir Thrí. The Luigni of the midlands were one of the most important vassal peoples of the southern Uí Néill: in the ninth century they even supplied a deputy king of Mide.²¹³ On the advice of Luigne Fer Trí, his mother took Cormac to be fostered in the north, well away from Mac Con, in the house of Fiachnae Cassán. He was already Art mac Cuinn's foster-father, and now, with the fosterage of Cormac mac Airt, Fiachnae Cassán had brought up two generations of the descendants of Conn. He, however, was the common ancestor of the Airthir, within whose territories lay Armagh.²¹⁴

²¹¹ For a fuller account, which embraces more texts than *Scéla Éogain ocus Cormaic*, see D. Ó Corráin, 'Historical Need and Literary Narrative', in D. E. Evans, J. G. Griffiths and E. M. Jope (eds.), *Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Celtic Studies* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 147–53.

²¹² *Scéla Éogain 7 Cormaic*, ed. Ó Cathasaigh, p. 119, lines 15–16 (tr. p. 124).

²¹³ AU 863.5; that he belonged to the Luigni of Mide is shown by *ibid.*, 901.1, which refers to his son as of the Luigni. ²¹⁴ CGH 1.139 (141 a 1), 182–3.

Both Luigne Fer Trí and Fíachnae Cassán were connected with other peoples. The Luigni were close kin to the Gailenga, the Ciannachta and others,²¹⁵ while Fíachnae Cassán may have represented the Airgíalla as a whole as well as the Airthir and Armagh in particular. The implication was that the Éoganachta and the Connachta and Uí Néill owed their power as much to their clients as to themselves. There was also a further suggestion – that the sons of kings of Tara might properly be fostered by their leading client-kings. Those who were to have influence on the choice of an heir to the kingdom should also gain close domestic knowledge of the candidates by rearing them in their own houses.

The story of the conception of Fiachu Munlethan and Cormac mac Airt, *Scéla Éogain ocus Cormaic*, ‘News of Éogan and Cormac’, had both strong mythological content – for example in the role of the she-wolf – and immediate contemporary meaning. The skill of the narrator was to combine the two. What he achieved was a mythological charter for a political order, in which the central relationship was the alliance between two *gentes* within the Féni, the Connachta and the Éoganachta. The story probably descends from a period when the Uí Néill still saw themselves as Connachta – a period which came to an end *c.* 650 – but even after that date such phrases as ‘descendants of Conn’, ‘Conn’s Half’ and ‘Conn’s Division’ (Dál Cuinn) preserved the connection between the Uí Néill and the Connachta and thus between the Uí Néill and their ancestors, Art mac Cuinn and Cormac mac Airt. Apart from the relationship between Éoganachta and Connachta, the story prescribes the political order of Leth Cuinn, both the perpetual legitimacy of the Uí Néill and also the assured position within the hegemony of the Uí Néill enjoyed by certain privileged free client-kingdoms.

A desire to connect the Éoganachta with Tara and with the Uí Néill is evident in other texts. The early eighth-century lawtract *Córus Béscnai* was a text that not only formed part of the *Senchas Már*, the great lawbook of Leth Cuinn, but was especially closely linked with the old Introduction to the entire lawbook and was thus associated with the process of compilation. It has a version of the legend of Patrick and Lóegaire, within which it includes an episode in which Conall Corc, ancestor and thus representative of the Éoganachta, submitted to Patrick at Tara.²¹⁶ The episode combines a secular subordination of

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, i.246–9.

²¹⁶ *CIH* 527–9; this may be linked with the proclamation of the Law of Patrick in Munster, AU 737.9.

Corc to Lóegaire with an assertion that, in the spiritual sphere, Corc was Patrick's friend. An acceptance by Munstermen of the supremacy of Tara is also implied by another legal tract, but this time of Munster provenance, *Bretha Nemed Toísech*, as well as by the Munster origin-legend, 'Conall Corc and the Corco Luigde'.²¹⁷

In the previous chapter it was argued that the Uí Néill were probably involved as allies of the Éoganachta in the destruction during the sixth century of an earlier hegemony in Munster, that of the Corcu Loígde and the Osraige. This alliance between the Connachta, led by the Uí Néill, and the Éoganachta seems to lie behind the origin-legends centred on Cormac mac Airt and Mac Con; it is also linked with the sense of the Féni as the dominant free *cenél*, 'race', in Ireland. The Féni also appear as the dominant people of Ireland in the laws, where the law of the Féni is the law of Ireland, even though the texts were entirely capable of distinguishing Féni from Ulaid. The cultural and political hegemony of the Féni may thus be interpreted as something new, presupposing not just the conquests of the sons of Níall in the midlands *c.* 500 but also the conquests of the Éoganachta, aided by the Uí Néill, in Munster during the sixth century.

A further aspect of the dominance of the Féni was, perhaps, the creation of standard Old Irish.²¹⁸ This was a language almost entirely free of dialect.²¹⁹ It was certainly a literary language, a language of poets, of lawyers and of churchmen; but it may also have been, at least in part, the language of the secular elite. Although it was sustained in existence from *c.* 600 until well into the Viking era by means of the mobility of the learned orders, its origins may stem from the conquests of the Uí Néill and the Éoganachta. Just as late Old English was in origin the language of Winchester, spread through the power of the tenth-century West Saxon kings of the English, so may Old Irish have been a local dialect given a new status through the triumphs of the Féni. Its emergence may have been at the expense of an earlier standard, represented in the ogam inscriptions, themselves associated topographically with areas outside the lands dominated by the Éoganachta.

²¹⁷ E. Bhreathnach, 'Temoria: Caput Scottorum?', *Ériu*, 47 (1996), 85–7; *CIH* 2219.39–40.

²¹⁸ I have discussed this topic at greater length elsewhere: 'Language and Society among the Insular Celts', pp. 727–9.

²¹⁹ A. Ahlqvist, 'Remarks on the Question of Dialects in Old Irish', in J. Fisiak (ed.), *Historical Dialectology, Regional and Social*, Trends in Linguistics, Studies and Monographs, 37 (Berlin, etc. 1988), 23–38; P. Kelly, 'Dialekte im Altirischen?', in W. Meid, H. Ölberg and H. Schmeja (eds.), *Sprachwissenschaft in Innsbruck* (Innsbruck, 1982), pp. 85–9.

We began with a problem: why were there *cánai* for the Connachta, for Munster and for Leth Cuinn, but not for Ulster or Leinster? This distribution now appears to be a corollary of the political order. The Uí Néill had established relationships of *cairde*, ‘alliance’ but also ‘kinship’, with the Connachta most immediately, but also with the Éoganachta of Munster. These dynasties accepted that they were, jointly, rulers within the political order that governed Ireland. The Uí Néill were *primi inter pares* in that, since 637, they had enjoyed an unchallenged hold on the kingship of Tara. In establishing that hold, and with it an entire political order, the Uí Néill had defeated, successively, the Leinstermen, the Ulstermen proper and the Cruithni of ‘Conchobor’s Province’, who themselves claimed to be the true Ulstermen. The royal sponsors of *cánai* were thus the Éoganachta and the Connachta within their own provinces, but the Uí Néill for Leth Cuinn and for their defeated rivals of Leinster and Ulster. When a *cáin* was promulgated for all Ireland, the king of Tara was the chief royal sponsor.

The list of guarantors for *Cáin Adomnáin* gives a glimpse of the political configuration of Ireland in 697.²²⁰ Among the laymen, the king of Tara came first, followed by his immediate allies of the northern Uí Néill; then came the king of Munster followed by the leading kings of his province; then the two main kings of the province of Ulster, the king of Brega and the king of Leinster. After that there was a miscellaneous group of kings, including Cellach mac Ragallaig, king of the Connachta. His lowly position can only be explained on the basis that Loingsech mac Óengussa, king of Tara, was from Cenél Conaill and thus within Tírechán’s larger Connaught, west of both the Shannon and the Foyle.²²¹

The political order established by the Uí Néill and their allies was based upon consent more than on military power. This consent was expressed in contractual form, in treaties of *cairde* between the principal kingdoms and in contracts of clientship with the base-client kingdoms, the *aithechthúatha*. Contractual language was all-pervasive, including the relationship between the king of an individual *túath* and his people as well as overkings and their client-kings and peoples. Indeed, the same language was used both for the grandest lordship, that of the king of Tara, and the lowliest, that of an *aire désa* and his five base clients. The political

²²⁰ *Cáin Adomnáin*, ed. Meyer, § 28; Ní Dhonnchadha, ‘The Guarantor List of *Cáin Adomnáin*’.

²²¹ See above, pp. 37–8 and cf. 508–10.

order was, therefore, one of contractual lordship, but it was also a complex pattern of lineages related by real consanguinity, by fictional consanguinity and by the non-consanguineal kinship of foster-parents and foster-children. The political order was also the social order.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Conclusion

Towards the end of his 'Book on the Measurement of the World', written in 825, the Irish scholar Dícuil has a passage on the northern isles, including the Hebrides (where he himself had lived in his youth), the Orkneys, the Faroes and Iceland. Dícuil was one of many Irish scholars who emigrated from Ireland and Scotland to the Carolingian empire to find work and patronage.¹ He wrote his account of world geography when he had already been living in Francia for many years. His career illustrates two contrary forces operating almost simultaneously in the last years of the eighth century and for much of the ninth: on the one hand, the closing in of the northern world with the advance of the Viking fleets and, on the other, the opportunities opening up on the continent. The combination of the two weakened intellectual life within Ireland and its Scottish outposts, though it is impossible to give any exact estimates of the decline.

Dícuil quoted the ancient geographer Solinus on the island called Thule, and went on to add something from his own knowledge. Thirty years before, that is about 795, he had been told by some clerics about the sun as seen from Thule at the summer solstice:

It is now thirty years since clerics, who had lived on the island from the first of February to the first of August, told me that not only at the summer solstice, but also in the days round about it, the sun setting in the evening hides itself as though behind a small hill in such a way that there was no darkness in that very small space of time, and a man could do whatever he wished as though the sun were there, even remove lice from his shirt, and if they had been on a mountain-top perhaps the sun would never have been hidden from them.²

The description fits the southern part of Iceland. It was there that the earliest Icelandic historian, Ari, said that Irish *papar*, with their books and

¹ Their works are conveniently listed by Lapidge and Sharpe, *A Bibliography of Celtic-Latin Literature, 400-1200*, pp. 169-94.

² *Dicuil's Liber de Mensura Orbis Terrae*, vii.11-15, (ed. and tr. J. J. Tierney with L. Bieler, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae*, 6 (Dublin, 1967), pp. 74-6.

their bells, had lived before the Northmen came.³ Once the pagan Scandinavians had settled, the Irish hermits departed. In the very year when his informants were telling Dicuill about the midsummer sun on Iceland, the annals recorded the first Viking attack in the Hebrides and an island off the Irish coast.⁴ Within a century, the Hebrides, previously part of the Irish world, had been renamed *Inse Gall*, 'the Islands of the Foreigners'.

Dicuill says much the same about islands which appear to be the Faeroes, where

for nearly a hundred years hermits sailing from our country, Ireland, have lived. But just as they were always deserted from the beginning of the world, so now, because of the Northman pirates, they are emptied of anchorites, and filled with countless sheep and very many diverse kinds of sea-birds.

By 825, when Dicuill was writing, Iona had been raided more than once, Kells had been built in the Irish midlands, 'the new *civitas* of Columba',⁵ and the conditions had been prepared for the headship of the Columban federation to move south to Ireland.⁶ An Irish Church that had sent out anchorites even as far as Iceland would now be hard hit in its homeland.

Initially, the attacks were confined to the Hebrides and to the coastlands of Ireland. The early medieval conception of Britain and Ireland was of two large islands surrounded by smaller ones; the latter were now to cease to be the natural homes of monks and were to become the bases of a new heathen enemy.⁷ During the Viking period, it was possible for Irishmen to look back on a period when it had been their fleets that had dominated the Irish Sea and the Hebrides. Cormac's Glossary (c. 900) tells an onomastic story about an area of turbulent waters known as Coire Brecáin (Corryvreckan).⁸ The modern Corryvreckan lies in the narrow straight between Jura and Scarba, but, for Cormac, Coire Brecáin was between the north of Ireland and Britain, at 'the meeting of many tides [literally 'seas'], that is, the tide that comes round Ireland

³ *Íslendingabók, Landnámabók*, ed. J. Benediktsson, Íslensk Fornrit 1 (Reykjavík, 1968), p. 5.

⁴ 'The burning of Rechraun by heathens and Skye was overwhelmed and laid waste', AU 795.3. I use 'Viking' with a capital V as a convenient modern term for Scandinavians in their roles as raiders, merchants, settlers and conquerors outside Scandinavia itself; in the ninth century Old English *wicing* was a common noun meaning 'pirate' and did not apply to all Scandinavians (e.g. *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, A, 917). It became more closely attached to Scandinavians in the late tenth century; see C. Fell, 'Old English *wicing*: A Question of Semantics', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 72 (1986), 295–316. ⁵ AU 807.4. For raids on Iona, see *ibid.*, 802.9; 806.8; 826.17.

⁶ Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, pp. 68–72.

⁷ AU 794.7: 'Devastation of all the islands of Britain by heathens'.

⁸ *Sanas Cormaic*, ed. Meyer, no. 323.

from the west and the tide that comes round Britain from the north-east and the tide from the south, between Ireland and Britain'. What he was describing was the effect of the tidal flows between the north-east of Ireland, the Mull of Kintyre and the Rhinns of Galloway; he may have been referring in particular to what is now known as Macdonnell's Race, off the east end of Rathlin Island. This had been the death of Brecán, 'a distinguished merchant for the Uí Néill; he had fifty ships engaged in trade between Ireland and Britain'. After 800 no merchant of the Uí Néill is likely to have organised the sea-borne trade between Ireland and Britain on such a scale; that would now be the preserve of 'the heathens', and they would soon be selling Irish slaves, the reward of their raids on Ireland itself.⁹

Historians have been divided over the effects of the Viking raids. Some have viewed them as agents of major change within Irish society and politics, others as merely increasing those forms of violence already endemic between the Irish themselves.¹⁰ Here, the development of the Viking threat will be pursued only up to the foundation of the permanent camps at Dublin and Lind Duachail (Annagassan) in 841. It should, however, be emphasised that to treat the issues as if only events within Ireland itself mattered is to undervalue the Irish role within Britain. If the first two generations of the Viking period were to see the Hebrides largely withdrawn from the Irish sphere of influence, they were also to see the final establishment of an Irish dynasty as overlords of the Picts and ultimately as creators of a new Scotia, a new Ireland within Britain. For the ultimate development of Scotland, it may be of importance that its origins lay within a period of Viking control over the western seas, a period when the links between Ireland and Scotland were not as easy to maintain as they had been when those same western seas had been the highways of Irish merchants and Irish monks.

The Viking threat developed in stages. From 794 to 807, the attacks were confined to islands and coastlands. After 807 there was more conflict on the mainland of Ireland, though probably still on a fairly minor scale, as in 811, when the Ulstermen defeated 'heathens'.¹¹ From 814 to 820 attacks subsided, this being the period of Áed Oirdnide's greatest power as king of Tara. Once he had died in 819 and there was

⁹ P. Houllm, 'The Slave Trade of Dublin, Ninth to Twelfth Centuries', *Peritia*, 5 (1986), 318–20.

¹⁰ D. A. Binchy, 'The Passing of the Old Order', in B. Ó Cuív (ed.), *The Impact of the Scandinavian Invasions on the Celtic-Speaking Peoples, c. 800–1100 AD* (Dublin, 1975), pp. 119–32; Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 148–59; A. T. Lucas, 'The Plundering and Burning of Churches in Ireland, Seventh to Sixteenth Centuries', in E. Rynne (ed.), *North Munster Studies* (Limerick, 1967), pp. 172–229 and Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans*, pp. 82–9; C. Etchingham, *Viking Raids on Irish Church Settlements in the Ninth Century*, Maynooth Monographs, Series Minor, 1 (Maynooth, 1996). ¹¹ AU 811.6.

no clear decision in the succession conflict between Murchad mac Máele Dúin and Conchobar mac Donnchada, however, attacks restarted.¹² The pattern of events shows, therefore, that the Vikings, by now well established in the Hebrides, had sources of political intelligence within Ireland. A further indication that they were well informed is that they did not attack the territories directly subject to Cenél nÉogain or Cland Cholmáin. Having attacked the coast of Brega in 819, they broke into 'Bangor the Great' (presumably the Ulster Bangor) in 823 and sacked Dún Lethglaise (Down) and Mag mBili (Movilla) in 825. The eastern part of Ulster, adjacent to the North Channel through which Viking fleets had to come in order to gain access to the Irish Sea, and adjacent also to the Isle of Man, was an obvious target. In the same year, 825, however, the Ulstermen defeated them in Mag nInis (south Co. Down). At this period, the southern Uí Néill were suffering much more from the attacks of Fedilmid mac Crimthainn, king of Munster, than from the Vikings.¹³

The 830s saw a major acceleration in both the frequency and range of Viking activity. They were now attacking Munster and both south and north-east Leinster, as well as Brega and Ulster, and even Connaught.¹⁴ There is no obvious reason within Ireland for this change, other than, perhaps, the relative ineffectiveness of the authority of Conchobar mac Donnchada as king of Tara; but even that can have no relevance to west Munster or south Leinster. The same period also saw a worsening of the situation for the Franks and the English, but it is unclear how much relevance this comparison has: the Franks, certainly, and probably also the English, were being attacked from Denmark and the conflict had much to do with dynastic rivalries among the Danes, as well as with trade and with claims to hegemony over the Elbe Slavs.¹⁵

As for the Irish, the likelihood is that the Hebridean Vikings had, by this time, taken control of the Isle of Man, from where the main British ruling dynasty had departed to Gwynedd by 825.¹⁶ From Man Vikings

¹² Ibid., 820.2; 821.5; meanwhile (821.3) 'Étar [Howth] was plundered by heathens; from there they carried off a great number of women.' Murchad mac Máele Dúin was finally deposed from the kingship of Cenél nÉogain in 823. ¹³ Ibid., 823.9; 826.8; 830.5–6; 831.10.

¹⁴ Etchingham, *Viking Raids on Irish Church Settlements*, p. 19, has a good map for the period 831–50, showing that only Connaught was relatively unscathed.

¹⁵ *Annales Regni Francorum*, ed. F. Kurze, MGH SRG (Hanover, 1895), 809, 810, 812, 814, 815, 817, 819, 821, 823, 826, 827.

¹⁶ The evidence for the Isle of Man origins of Merfyn Frych is AU 878 and the *Kyuoesi Myrdin a Gwendyd y Chwaer* (*Myryrian Archaeology*, 110, Stanza 36 = *The Poetry in the Red Book of Hergest*, ed. J. Gwenogvryn Evans [Llanbedrog, 1911], 578. 40), which provides a king-list of Gwynedd in verse, initially going up as far as the tenth century but with a stanza which may refer to Gruffudd ap Cynan. His accession is dated to 825 by the obit of his predecessor, Hywel, *Annales Cambriae*, 825, confirmed by the chronology of the *Historia Brittonum*: D. N. Dumville, 'Some Aspects of the Chronology of the *Historia Brittonum*', *BBCS* 25 (1972–4), 440.

could strike anywhere in the Irish Sea. Yet they were still posing a serious threat further north, for in 839 they won a major battle against the men of Fortriu;¹⁷ the latter suffered heavy casualties, and this defeat is probably part of the context in which Cináed mac Ailpín took control of Fortriu on his way to becoming overking of the Picts.¹⁸

Conchobar mac Donnchada of Cland Cholmáin, king of Tara, died in 833 and was succeeded by Níall Caille, the son of Áed Oirdnide, who was to reign until 846. Níall Caille had some success against the Vikings but largely within his own kingdom of Cenél nÉogain.¹⁹ This was not because he was unable to intervene further south; he is recorded as leading armies into Leinster to impose his candidate as king and into the midlands to oppose Fedilmid mac Crimthainn, king of Munster. The evidence suggests, therefore, that he was active outside the north to assert his authority against Irish rivals but not to repel Viking attacks. One possible reason is that campaigns against Leinster could be planned far in advance and the necessary summons to client kings issued, whereas Viking raids were unpredictable. The military power deployed by kings of Tara was essentially offensive and thus much less effective against attacks mounted from the sea, except within their own local territory.²⁰

The military and political situation was changed when the Vikings established their first fortified winter camp on Lough Neagh in 839, from where 'they plundered the peoples and churches of the north of Ireland'.²¹ In 840 Louth was attacked from Lough Neagh: 'they led away captive bishops and priests and scholars'.²² In 841 Vikings are said still to be on Lough Neagh, but they are not described as attacking anyone and this entry is the last mention of that camp.²³ Moreover, the entry about Lough Neagh is the first one within an annal that also records the establishment of two new wintering camps, one at Linn Dúachaill and the other at Dublin, both formerly churches.²⁴ These camps further

¹⁷ AU 839. 9.

¹⁸ Anderson, *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland*, pp. 188–99; Smyth, *Warlords and Holy Men*, pp. 175–91; B. T. Hudson, *Kings of Celtic Scotland* (Westport, Conn., 1994), pp. 34–47; P. Wormald, 'The Emergence of the *Regnum Scottorum*: A Carolingian Hegemony?', in B. E. Crawford (ed.), *Scotland in Dark-Age Britain* (St Andrews, 1996), pp. 131–47. ¹⁹ AU 833.3; 845.6.

²⁰ Áed Oirdnide had perhaps proved an obstacle to Viking attack from the Hebrides because some of his main territories were on the northern seaboard. He was thus able to deploy local defence rather than a distant response. ²¹ AU 839.7. ²² *Ibid.*, 840.1.

²³ It presumably has no connection with that at Rubae Mena, AU 930.3; according to Hogan, *Onom.*, Rubae Mena was on the site of the later Shane's Castle by the mouth of the River Main, J 11 88.

²⁴ AU 841.4. 5. Cf. AU 757.6 etc. for Linn Duachaill; AU 790.2 for Dublin. On the early history and the relationship of Dublin to Áth Cliath, see H. B. Clarke, 'The Topographical Development of Early Medieval Dublin', and P. F. Wallace, 'The Origins of Dublin', in H. B. Clarke, (ed.), *Medieval Dublin: The Making of a Metropolis* (Blackrock, Co. Dublin, 1990), pp. 52–69, 70–97.

south had been preceded by Viking activity on the Liffey and Boyne in 837, when they defeated 'the Uí Néill from the Shannon to the Sea at Inber na mBarc'. The likelihood is that the Vikings on Lough Neagh had joined one or other of these two encampments at Linn Dúachaill and Dublin. They were situated one close to the northern, and the other close to the southern end of the low-lying coastline between the Mourne and Dublin Mountains. The effect was to move the main thrust of the Viking attacks southwards to the lands held by the southern Uí Néill and away from Niall Caille's base in the north. Linn Dúachaill was to continue as a Viking settlement until it was apparently abandoned in 927. The Dublin camp was abandoned in 902 but re-established, perhaps on a new site, in 917.²⁵

About the time when the wintering camps at Dublin and Linn Dúachaill were being established, a scholar later named John Scottus or Eriugena left Ireland for West Francia.²⁶ He soon established himself as a favourite of the young Charles the Bald, a noted patron of learning and the arts, who had become king of West Francia after the death of Louis the Pious in 840 and had succeeded in sustaining his position against his elder brother Lothar. Since conditions were particularly troubled in Francia at this period, it is more likely that John left Ireland to escape a direct threat to his home than that he had any particular reason to think that he would find employment. There is no reason to think that he relied on an existing Irish link with Francia, such as that between Slane, Louth and Péronne. For one thing, he appears not to have been in orders, nor was he a monk.²⁷ He is one of an admittedly short list of known Irish or Irish-trained scholars who acquired the highest intellectual training without becoming either a monk or a cleric.²⁸

John Scottus was neither the first nor the last Irish scholar to settle in the Frankish dominions. The foundations of Péronne and Bobbio, resting-places of Fursu and Columbanus, much more so than Luxeuil, maintained the links with Ireland created in the seventh century. What was new about the Carolingian period was not that Irishmen went to study or teach on the European mainland, but that they did so in larger

²⁵ AU 902.2; 917.4; 919.3.

²⁶ M. Cappuyns, *Jean Scot Érigène: sa vie, son œuvre, sa pensée* (Paris-Louvain, 1933), pp. 53–4, showed that it is very likely that Eriugena was already in Francia before Prudentius became bishop of Troyes in 845 or 846; for further discussion and a collection of passages bearing on his life, see M. Brennan, 'Material for the Biography of John Scottus Eriugena', *Studi medievali*, 3rd series, 27/1 (1986), 413–60.

²⁷ Cappuyns, *Jean Scot Érigène*, pp. 66–7, on the basis of Prudentius, *De Praedestinatione*, c. 3 (*PL* 115, col. 1043 A). There was no question of disciplining him in the way Hincmar could discipline Gottschalk, by virtue of his being a monk.

²⁸ Cf. the Irish *scholasticus* of Bede, *HE* iii.13, and the partially Irish-educated Aldfrith, king of Northumbria, *ibid.*, iv.26/24.

numbers. It has been remarked that among foreign scholars working in Francia, the Irish greatly outnumbered the contingents from England, Lombard Italy and the remnants of Visigothic Spain.²⁹ Moreover, by the end of John Scottus' life, Canterbury, the archiepiscopal see of southern and midland England, could hardly find a single scribe competent in Latin.³⁰ The deficiencies of Canterbury in the late ninth century corroborate Alfred's complaints about education in southern England.³¹ The achievements of the finest scholars, such as John Scottus, are necessarily exceptional. What is striking about early Irish Latin culture, and thus the Irish contribution to the Carolingian Renaissance, is its strength in numbers. As the annalistic obits for *scribae* and *sapientes* suggest, most, if not all, major churches, and also many middling communities, sustained an independent capacity to give instruction in Latin and in exegesis. Scholars were relatively thick on the ground because it had become part of the status of a church to have a good scholar, and because scholarship conferred high status on individuals.

The ninth and tenth centuries were, however, to see a change in the nature of that scholarship. The vernacular had been used, alongside Latin, for religious texts since at least the early seventh century. Now, however, there was a shift by which the vernacular gained a greater prominence. Partly, this prominence consists of the multiplication of texts that were always in Irish, such as sagas. Yet genres previously restricted to Latin were being invaded by the vernacular. The annals had been in Latin except for the odd technical term and such words as *macc* 'son'; by c. 940 they were using much more Irish.³² Vernacular biblical commentary is attested for the first time in the ninth century.³³ The implication is that the learning required of an ecclesiastical scholar could now be, to a greater or lesser extent, in Irish; and that often meant that the texts associated with that learning were concerned with Ireland rather than being part of the general cultural inheritance of the Latin Church. The intellectual ties connecting Ireland to western Europe were weakening, while those attaching scholars to their homeland were becoming more powerful. The great cultural opening to Europe that

²⁹ J. J. Contreni, 'The Irish Contribution to the European Classroom', in D. Ellis Evans *et al.* (eds.), *Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Celtic Studies*, pp. 79–80.

³⁰ Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury*, pp. 171–4.

³¹ Alfred, Preface to his translation of Gregory's Pastoral Care, *Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Reader*, revised edn by D. Whitelock (Oxford, 1967), pp. 4–7.

³² D. N. Dumville, 'Latin and Irish in the *Annals of Ulster*, AD 431–1050', in D. Whitelock *et al.* (eds.), *Ireland in Early Mediaeval Europe: Studies in Memory of Kathleen Hughes* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 330.

³³ K. Meyer, *Hibernica Minora . . . an Old-Irish Treatise on the Psalter*, *Anecdota Oxoniensia* (Oxford, 1894).

came with Christian conversion was certainly not wholly reversed, but it was weakened.³⁴

Viking attacks contributed to the weakening of Latin culture in Ireland, but this was a slow process extending long after our period. The same was true of the undermining of the political order created by the Uí Néill and the Éoganachta. Here too there were slow processes at work, helped on their way by the individual actions of Irish rulers but also by Viking attacks. The political order in the middle of the eighth century rested on firm peace treaties between Munster, the Uí Néill and the Connachta. The Shannon frontier between the southern Uí Néill and the Connachta saw virtually no military action during the eighth century; the boundary between the Uí Néill and Munster was not as peaceful, but it saw sufficiently little warfare to show that a peace-treaty, *cairde*, must have been in force for most of the time. All this is what we should expect on the evidence of the genealogies and origin-legends. As we saw in the case of the Airgíalla, past kinship and shared experience offered a language for, and a validation of, a present treaty. As real royal lineages ruled individual kingdoms, so a single fictional lineage ruled Ireland. True, there was one serious disagreement: Munster sources claimed that Leinster should be part of Leth Moga, identified with the southern half of Ireland, while the Uí Néill and especially Cenél nÉogain devoted much of their military effort to subduing the Leinstermen to themselves. Yet it had usually been possible to reconcile such potential conflicts, notably in the run-up to the battle of Áth Senaig in 738.³⁵

The peace also depended on the Church, and not just because churchmen probably composed genealogies and origin-legends.³⁶ The Shannon frontier housed several major monasteries, in particular Clonmacnois with its dependency, Inis Aingin, in Lough Ree. Clonmacnois was within the overkingdom of Mide but had become by 800 the most powerful church of Connaught. The frontier with Munster lay in a zone dominated geographically by Slíab Bladma, Slieve Bloom. The concentration of major monasteries in this zone is exemplified most clearly by an eighth-century collection of saints' lives in a fourteenth-century manuscript: all of the saints celebrated, with two exceptions,

³⁴ A well-known example of a tenth-century Irish scholar on the continent who was held in high repute is Israel of Trier: Ruotger, *Vita Brunonis Archiepiscopi Coloniensis*, c. 7, ed. I. Ott, MGH SRG new ser. 10 (repr. Cologne, 1958), p. 8; see further Kenney, *Sources*, pp. 605–21.

³⁵ A meeting between Aed Allán and Cathal mac Finguini took place in 737, the year before the battle. The entry about Cathal's hostage-taking, AU 738.9, must be misplaced: both of the Leinster kings named, one by AU and the other by AT, were already dead.

³⁶ Cloyne and 'Conall Corc and Corco Loigde', above, p. 523.

belonged to monasteries within twenty-five miles of the highest point of Slieve Bloom.

The first clear break in the non-violent role of these churches occurred in the last years as king of Tara of Domnall mac Murchada and in the year after his death (20 November 763). The crucial annal entries are as follows:

AU 760.9: A battle between the communities of Clonmacnois and Birr in Móin Choisse Bláe.

AU 764.6: The battle of Argaman between the people of Clonmacnois and of Durrow, in which there fell Diarmait (Dub) son of Domnall (and Diglach son of Dub Les and two hundred men of the people of Durrow. Bresal son of Murchad was the victor together with the people of Clonmacnois).³⁷

AU 764.11: The killing of Bresal son of Murchad.

AU 764.12: The battle of Dún mBile won by Donnchad over the Fir Thelach.

Birr lay on the very boundary between Munster and the southern Uí Néill, Clonmacnois just on the Mide side of the Shannon, while Durrow was close to the boundary between Mide and the far north-western tip of Leinster. Donnchad, the victor in the battle of Dún mBile in 764, was the son of Domnall mac Murchada, and would himself become king of Tara a few years later; the battle was one stage in his establishment of a firm grip over the client-kingdoms of Mide, of which Fir Thelach was one of the most notable. His final victory over his last dynastic rival came the next year.³⁸

Bresal mac Murchada, killed probably shortly before the battle of Dún mBile, is likely to have been Donnchad's uncle, while Diarmait Dub may have been his brother; both may have been rivals for the succession to Domnall. What the entry on the battle of Argaman suggests, therefore, is that two major churches within the overkingdom of Mide had been drawn into a war of succession, in which the community of Durrow supported Diarmait Dub mac Domnaill and the community of Clonmacnois supported Bresal mac Murchada. Neither of these two leaders survived the year. None of this need mean that what a later age would call choir monks took part in the fighting: the community of a major monastery contained many laymen subject to the religious authority of the abbot. Perhaps the ban on monastic involvement in vio-

³⁷ Bracketed words are in AU but not in AT.

³⁸ AU 765.5.

lence was not entirely cast aside.³⁹ Nevertheless, once a monastery had participated in dynastic conflict, the continued effectiveness of the Slieve Bloom area as a non-combatant zone, dividing Munster from the Uí Néill and keeping the peace between them, was in danger.

Some entries from the 770s show how real this danger was, and also Donnchad mac Domnaill's lack of concern that the peace be kept on his southern frontier.

AU 775.5: An encounter between the Munstermen and the Uí Néill; and Donnchad ordered a great harrying in the lands of the Munstermen; and many of the Munstermen fell.

AU 775.6: A skirmish at Clonard between Donnchad and the community of Clonard.

AU 776.5: A taking on circuit of the relics of St Erc of Slane, and a taking on circuit of the relics of Uinniausus of Clonard.

AU 776.11: A decisive battle between the Uí Néill and Munster, in which the community of Durrow took part, and the sons of Tobáeth, that is Duinechaid and Cathrannach, and some of the sons of Donnchad; and many of the Munstermen fell, and the victors were the Uí Néill.

These entries show major monasteries both as perpetrators and as victims of violence. Clonard was situated close to the boundary with Leinster, but this did not prevent Donnchad from using violence to impose his will on the community. Their response may have been the decision to take the relics of the patron saint, St Finnian, on circuit (significantly, perhaps, the annalist uses the old and probably British form of his name). Clonard probably had dependent churches in both Leinster and Munster, as well as in the lands of the Uí Néill: if the relics received reverence and tribute outside the lands ruled by Donnchad mac Domnaill, that might do something to restore the community's self-confidence.

Durrow was in a different position. Donnchad's father, Domnall, had made Durrow his favourite church, and he may well have been buried within the monastic precinct. As Armagh was favoured by Cland Cholmáin's rivals, Cenél nÉogain, so Domnall supported Durrow. Its unhesitating, indeed unblushing support for Domnall's son and successor as king is exemplified by the last entry given above, in which the community of Durrow was particularly marked out by the annalist as a

³⁹ On the other hand, in a later battle in 783 at the great monastery of Ferns in Leinster the two leaders were the abbot and the steward: *ibid.*, 783.6.

participant on the victorious side (entries on battles usually specify those who died on the defeated side rather than going into any detail on the composition of the victorious army). These entries show, therefore, that under Donnchad mac Domnaill the peace between Munster and the Uí Néill was breaking down. While he may not himself have led the Uí Néill army in 776, he was responsible for the attack on Munster in 775.

At this period, as Donnchad mac Domnaill was building up his power, the rulers of Munster had no capacity to make an adequate response. Their most active military leader was the king of Osraige, Anmchad mac Con Cerae, and his ambitions lay in attacking Leinster.⁴⁰ After Donnchad's death, however, during the reign of his son, Conchobar, Mide endured several invasions from Fedlimid mac Crimthainn, king of Munster, which included attacks on such churches as Clonmacnois. The kings of Mide now had to face not just their usual northern rivals, Cenél nÉogain, but also Munster. Intermittently, they would be dramatically successful in this new confrontation on their southern frontier; but, in the long run, Mide, the political heart of early Christian Ireland, was fatally weakened. Moreover the long alliance between Mide and the Connachta was also beginning to weaken, possibly under the strain of Munster attacks.⁴¹ When, therefore, the Vikings relinquished their wintering base on Lough Neagh and set up the twin camps at Dublin and Lind Duachaill, straddling the wide-open eastern doorway from the Irish Sea into the midlands, they were setting themselves to attack an area of Uí Néill power already under severe strain.

The 840s saw the most severe phase of the struggle. By 844 there was a further Viking settlement on Lough Ree, rendering the Shannon basin immediately vulnerable to attack. The lands of the southern Uí Néill were now surrounded by hostile camps. In 846, in the midst of this decade of raids, Níall Caille, Cenél nÉogain king of Tara, died; in the next year the king of Munster, Feidlimid mac Crimthainn, also died. The new king of Tara, Máel Sechnaill mac Maíle Rúanaid, was from Cland Cholmáin and was already king of Mide and thus situated in the very centre of conflict with the Vikings. In 848, both Máel Sechnaill and Ólchobor, the new king of Munster – the latter in an exceptional alliance with the Leinstermen – secured major victories over the Vikings, while Tigernach, king of Lagore, and the Éoganacht of Cashel followed

⁴⁰ AT (years equivalent to AU uncorrected/corrected dates) 746/7, 747/8, 749/50, 758/9, 760/1 (the last two may be a doublet, although the site was an obvious one for clashes between Osraige and the Leinstermen, so that two battles in fairly rapid succession in the same place are not out of the question).

⁴¹ AU 829.4 (the Connachta defeated by the men of Mide); 830.6 (Feidlimid mac Crimthainn routs the southern Uí Briúin).

these successes with ones of their own;⁴² a great Irish victory (it is unclear which of those mentioned in the annals, perhaps all) appears to have been reported by Irish envoys to Charles the Bald, king of West Francia, as a most unusual success.⁴³

When Máel Sechnaill and Tigernach plundered Dublin in 849, it may have seemed that the worst of the Viking threat was over.⁴⁴ This was, however, succeeded by the arrival of a new and formidable Viking fleet:

A naval expedition of seven score ships of the people of the king of the *Gaill* [Vikings] came to enforce his power over the *Gaill* who were there previously, and they threw the whole of Ireland into confusion.⁴⁵

For the next few years there was indeed confusion and division, both among the Irish and among the Vikings. The king of north Brega, Cináed mac Conaing, 'rebelled against Máel Sechnaill with the aid of the *Gaill*' and 'plundered the Uí Néill from the Shannon to the sea'.⁴⁶ He was executed by Máel Sechnaill the following year, 851; but that year also saw the arrival in Dublin of the 'Dark Heathens'; they attacked the 'White Foreigners' and plundered the ship-encampment. (The 'Dark Heathens' are understood by most scholars as Danes, the 'White' as Norwegians.) The two groups continued their struggle in 852, but in 853 'Amlaib, son of the king of Laithlind, came to Ireland, and the Foreigners of Ireland gave hostages to him, and tribute was paid by the Irish'.⁴⁷

The confused politics of 849–53 were now replaced by a more stable situation: the Vikings came under the authority of men whose names are recorded in the Irish annals. The Vikings and the Irish were coming closer to each other: tribute payments partially replaced plundering raids. In terms of a flow of resources from the Irish to the Vikings, there may have been little to choose between tribute and plunder, but at least tribute was predictable. As for the Uí Néill, the ignominies to which they had been subjected by the former king of Munster, Feidlimid mac Crimthainn, were now reversed by the successes enjoyed by Máel Sechnaill in his campaigns against Munster. He resumed the aggressive policies of his grandfather, Donnchad mac Domnaill, and pursued them with greater vigour and success.⁴⁸

A set of developments were, therefore, combining to weaken the old

⁴² *Ibid.*, 848.4, 5, 6, 7.

⁴³ *Annals of St-Bertin*, 848, ed. R. Rau, *Quellen zur Karolingischen Rechtsgeschichte* (Darmstadt, 1969), ii, p. 72; tr. J. L. Nelson, *The Annals of St-Bertin*, Manchester Medieval Sources (Manchester, 1991), p. 66. ⁴⁴ CS 849. ⁴⁵ AU (and CS) 849.

⁴⁶ AU 850.3. His principal target seems to have been his rival from within Síl nÁeda Sláine, Tigernach of Lagore. ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 853.2.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 854.2 (the very next year after the arrival of Amlaib), 856.2, 858.4, 859.2.

order that had been based upon an alliance between the Uí Néill, the Éoganachta and the Connachta. The initial changes occurred as the result of deliberate action by Donnchad mac Domnaill in the generation before the Vikings first appeared in Irish waters. The attacks on Mide and Brega mounted by Feidlimid mac Crimthainn demonstrated that the Éoganachta could take revenge on the Uí Néill, while Máel Sechnaill's reply set the seal on a new phase of Irish politics, in which Munster and the Uí Néill were no longer regular allies. During the reigns of Feidlimid mac Crimthainn and his Uí Néill contemporaries, Conchobor mac Donnchada and Níall Caille, Viking attacks became much more damaging and also concentrated on the midlands, precisely the area in which the actions of Donnchad mac Domnaill had opened up new fault-lines in the Irish political order. It may be argued that this concentration on the midlands is only apparent, a consequence of the compilation of the Chronicle of Ireland in the region;⁴⁹ yet it is probably true that an early concentration of Viking pressure on the north-east was succeeded in 841 by a shift southwards, indicated by the foundation of the fortified winter camps at Linn Dúachaill and Dublin. Admittedly the place at which the Chronicle was then being recorded very probably caused the Viking concentration on the midlands to be exaggerated, but the exaggeration was of a real change and was not a mere illusory impression.⁵⁰

The long-term effects of the Vikings on Ireland are very difficult to judge.⁵¹ This is partly for the reasons already given, namely that they combined together with other changes which preceded their arrival. It is, however, likely that, in combination, these changes made Ireland a considerably less favourable environment for scholarship and art. Even when tribute succeeded plunder as the normal mode by which the Vikings extracted resources from Ireland, their influence reduced the resources available to the Irish elite. True, the Vikings may have made wealth in bullion, especially silver, more liquid: their raids on churches probably reduced the proportion of silver kept in the form of static treasure, for example in chalices and book-covers.⁵² In so far as the silver

⁴⁹ This possibility is discussed by Etchingham, *Viking Raids on Irish Church Settlements*, pp. 17–34.

⁵⁰ Important to this argument is the evidence in the annals of Viking pressure on Ulster up to the last mention of the camp on Lough Neagh in 841, the year in which the camps of Dublin and Linn Dúachaill were established.

⁵¹ See the different assessments of Binchy, 'The Passing of the Old Order', pp. 118–32, and Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans*, pp. 82–9, 104–10.

⁵² G. Duby, *The Early Growth of the European Economy: Warriors and Peasants from the Seventh to the Twelfth Century* (London, 1974), pp. 118–20.

plundered from Irish treasure was then used within Ireland to buy goods, it is possible that there was a circular process by which Vikings transformed static bullion into exchangeable silver.⁵³ It is not clear, however, that this process would also operate when plunder tended to give way to tribute. Irish churches are likely to have suffered, not just in the phase dominated by plunder, but also when tribute-taking became normal. Many churches were both rich and known to be rich, both through their own wealth and through gifts and deposits from the laity: they are now likely to have paid heavily to secure protection; and lay donors, subject to similar pressures, may have been less generous. It is even possible that the preparedness of Irish rulers such as Feidlimid mac Crimthainn to plunder the wealthier monasteries was caused not just by their political links, such as those between Clonmacnois and Cland Cholmáin, but by the need to gain additional resources when their own kingdoms were under pressure from the Vikings.

The changes of the ninth century can usually be sensed in outline rather than demonstrated. Yet they form an appropriate conclusion to a history of early Christian Ireland. The central theme of that history is the creation and development within Ireland of a vigorous local variety of Latin Christianity. The history of early Irish kings is more than Gibbon's 'register of the crimes, follies, and misfortunes of mankind' because those kings established a political order in which Christianity, together with its scholarship and art, could flourish. After the Viking phase in Irish history came that period in its political life which has properly been entitled 'the wars of the great provincial kings'.⁵⁴ Those wars, stretching from the tenth to the twelfth century, ultimately stemmed from the activities of Donnchad mac Domnaill. They were far less conducive to civilisation than the more peaceable order of the seventh and early eighth centuries, and they left Ireland, in the opinion of western European contemporaries, a country of picturesque but deplorable barbarity.⁵⁵

⁵³ On ninth-century silver, see J. Graham-Campbell, 'The Viking Age Silver Hoards of Ireland', in B. Almqvist and D. Greene (eds.), *Proceedings of the Seventh Viking Conference* (Dublin, 1976), pp. 35–55, esp. the diagram on p. 47.

⁵⁴ Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans*, chap. 4; M. T. Flanagan, 'Irish and Anglo-Norman Warfare in Twelfth-Century Ireland', in T. Bartlett and K. Jeffery (eds.), *A Military History of Ireland* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 52–75.

⁵⁵ R. Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales, 1146–1223* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 158–77, but note Alcuin's remark to the monks of Mayo: 'and let your light shine in the midst of a most barbarous nation like a bright star in the western sky': *Ep.* 287, ed. Dümmler, p. 446, tr. Allott, p. 44; the allusion to Philippians 2:15 makes this passage especially uncomplimentary.

APPENDIX

Genealogies and king-lists

I. Dál Cuinn

Southern Uí Néill

- II. Síl nÁedo Sláine: Brega
- III. Cland Cholmáin Mair and Cland Cholmáin Bicc

Northern Uí Néill

- IV. Cenél Conaill and the abbots of Iona
- V. Cenél nÉogain

Ousted Uí Néill

- VI. Cenél Coirpri
- VII. Cenél Fiachach

Munster

- VIII. Early Éoganachta
- IX. Conall Corc and the Corcu Loígde
- X. Munster king-lists
- XI. Éoganacht Glendamnach
- XII. Éoganacht Chaisil
- XIII. Éoganacht Áine and Éoganacht Airthir Chliach
- XIV. Éoganacht Locha Léin

Leinster

- XV. Early Leinster
- XVI. Leinster king-lists compared
- XVII. Uí Dúnlainge
- XVIII. Uí Chennselaig
- XIX. Uí Máil

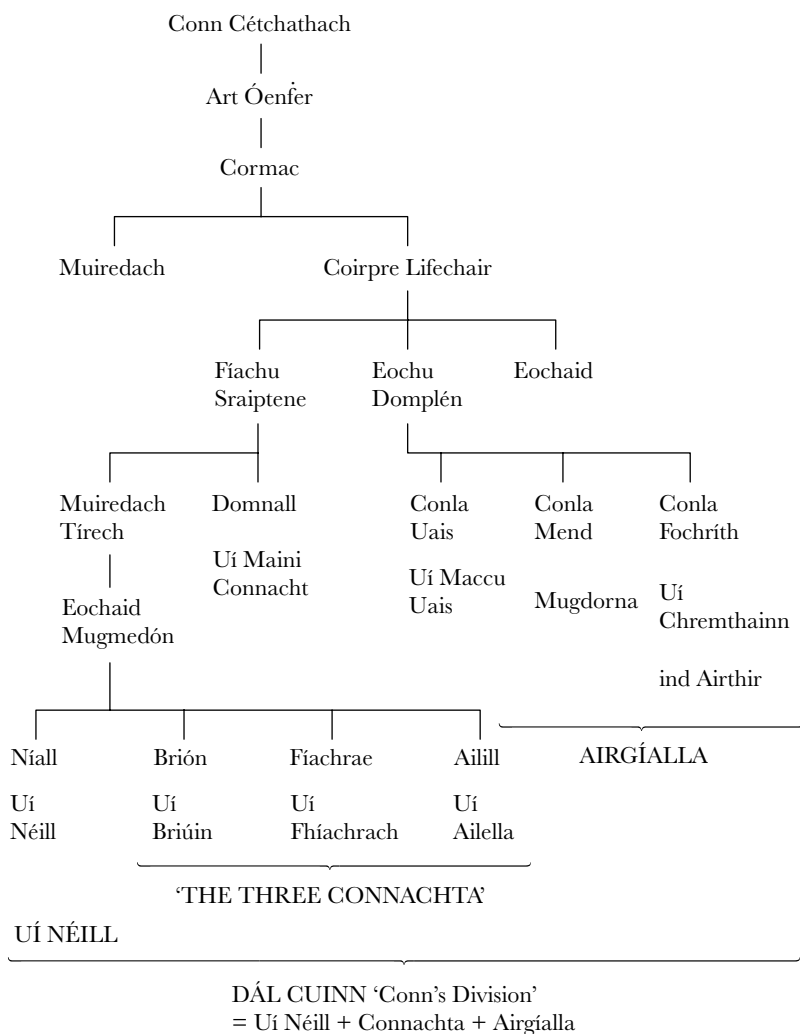
Ulster

- XX. Ulaid king-list
XXI. Genealogy of Dál Fiatach
XXII. Cruithni (Dál nAraidi)

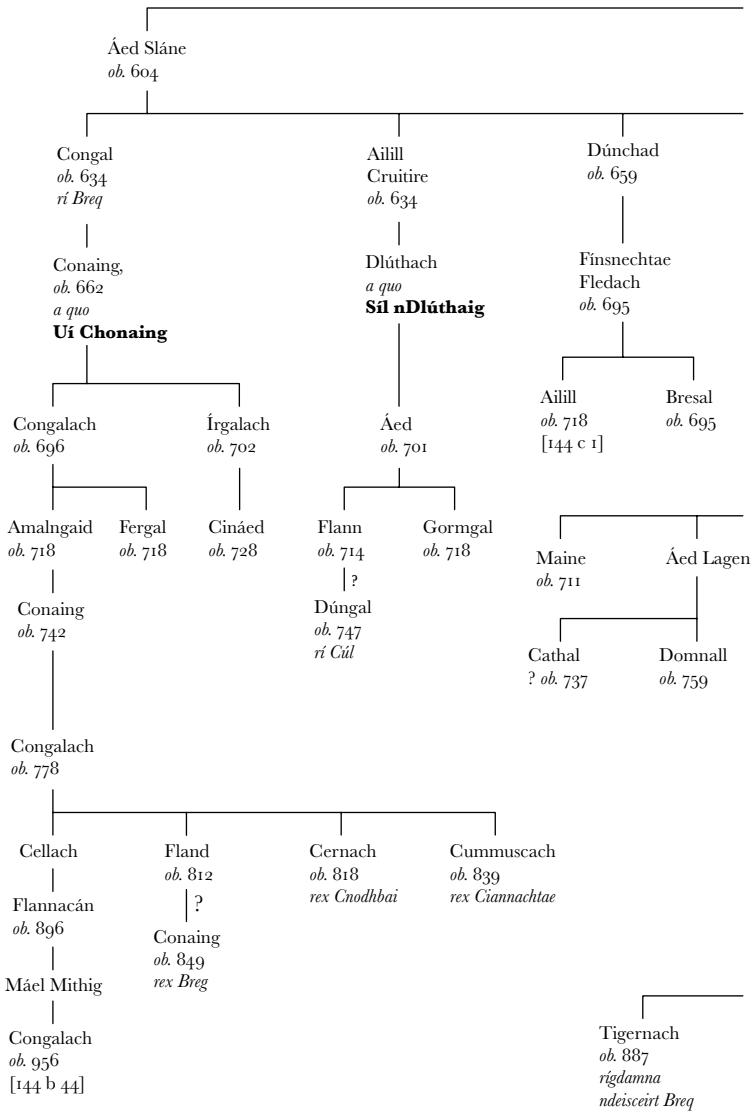
Connachta

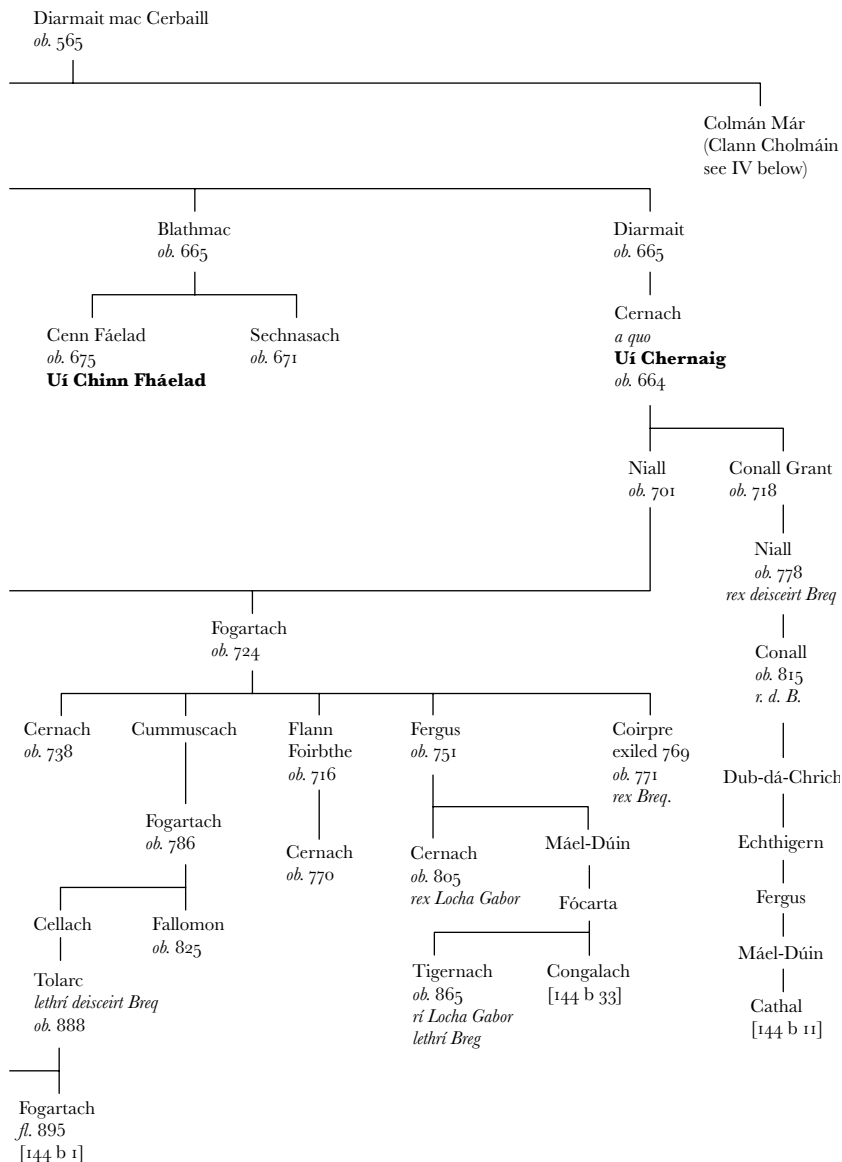
- XXIII. Early Connachta
XXIV. King-list

I. Dál Cuinn



II. Síl nÁedo Sláine: the kings of Brega





In the guarantor list in *Cáin Adomnáin*:

Niall mac Cernaig is king of Bregmag.

Mane mac Néill appears without title.

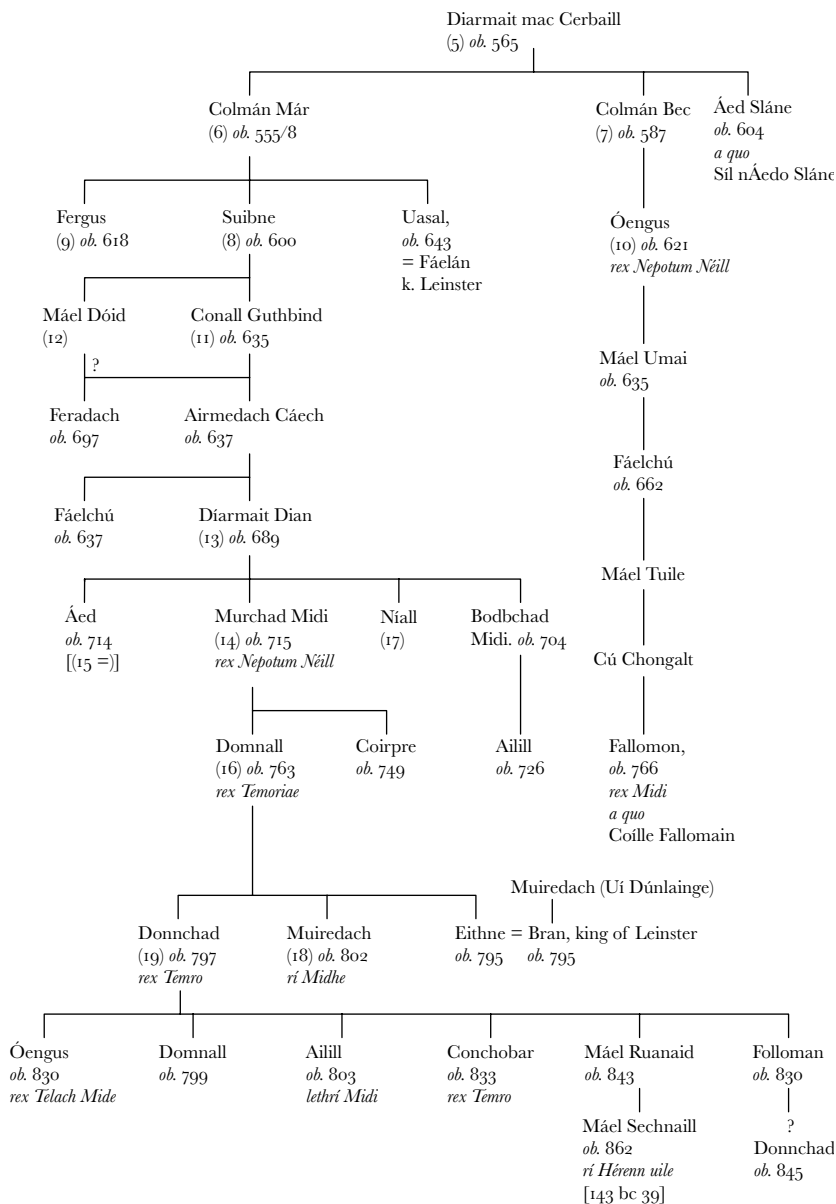
Áed mac Dlúthaig is *ri Cúl*.

Fiannamail ua Dúinchada appears without title.

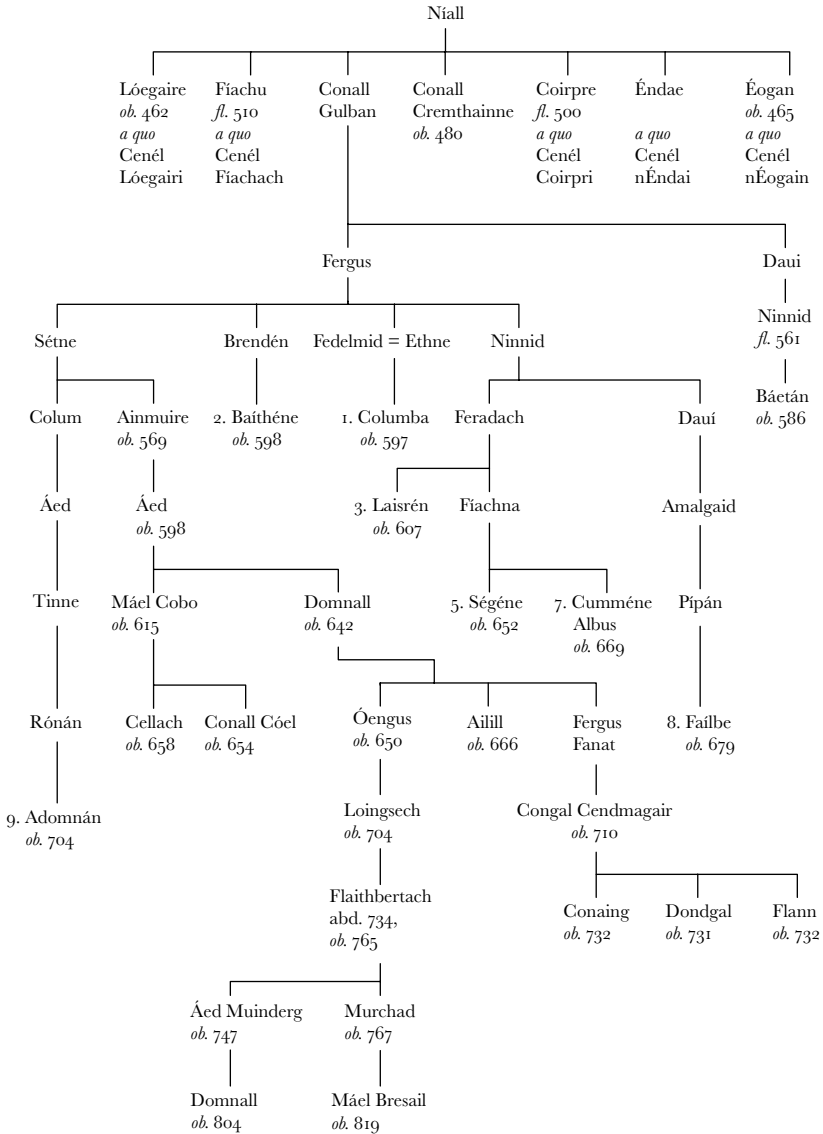
Conall Grant is *ri Deiseirt Breg*.

Írgalach ua Conaing is *ri Ciannachtae*.

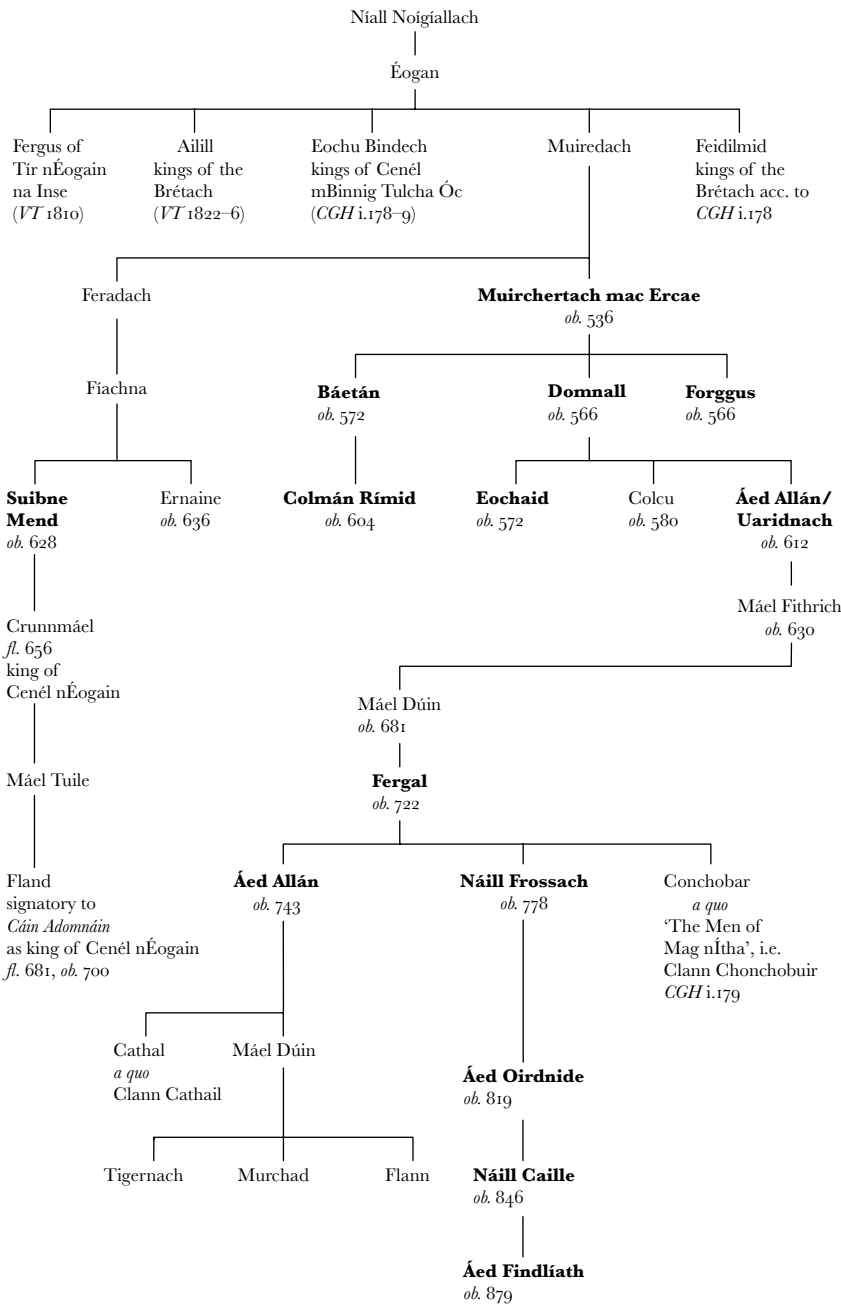
III. Cland Cholmáin Máir and Cland Cholmáin Bicc (nos. refer to the order in the king-list)



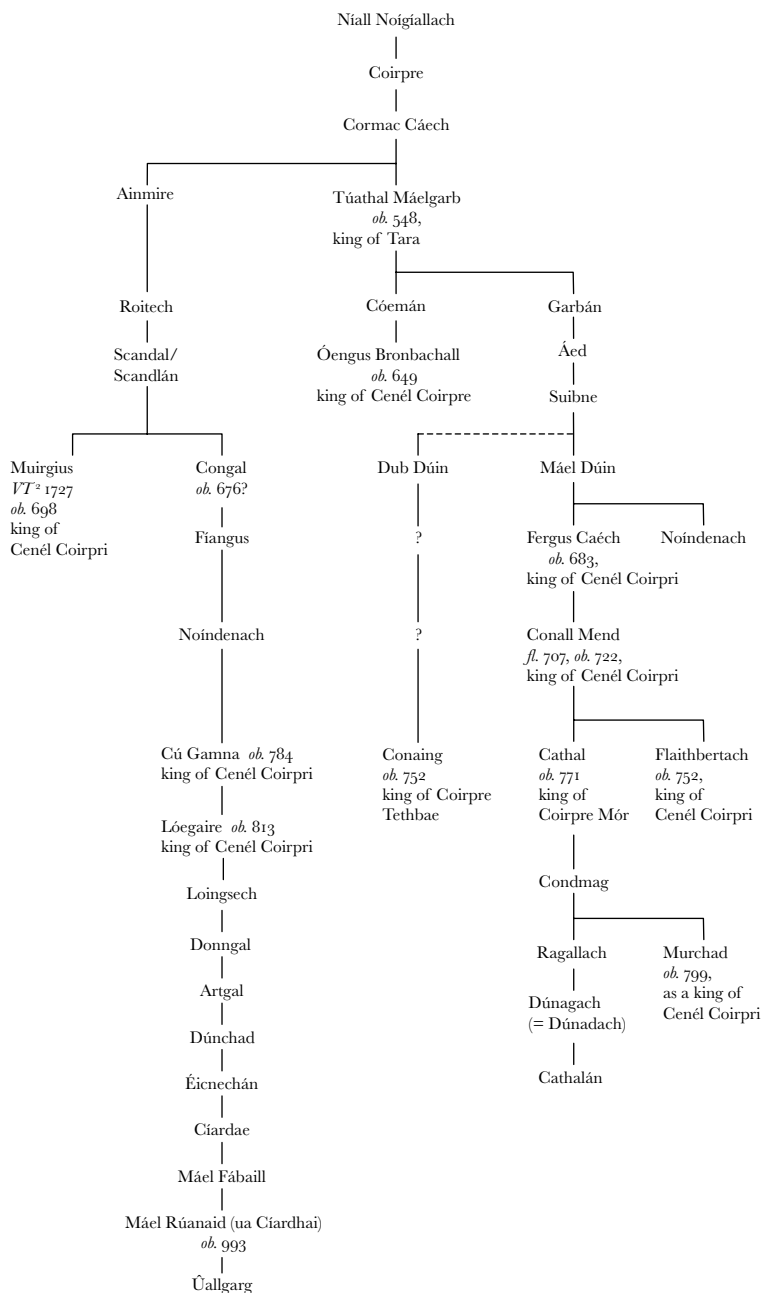
IV. Cenél Conaill and the abbots of Iona



V. Cenél nÉogain (names in bold are kings of Tara)



VI. Cenél Coirpri

CGH i.166 Book of Ballymote, p.83 a 26 (partially corrected from Adomnán, *ISC* i.13)

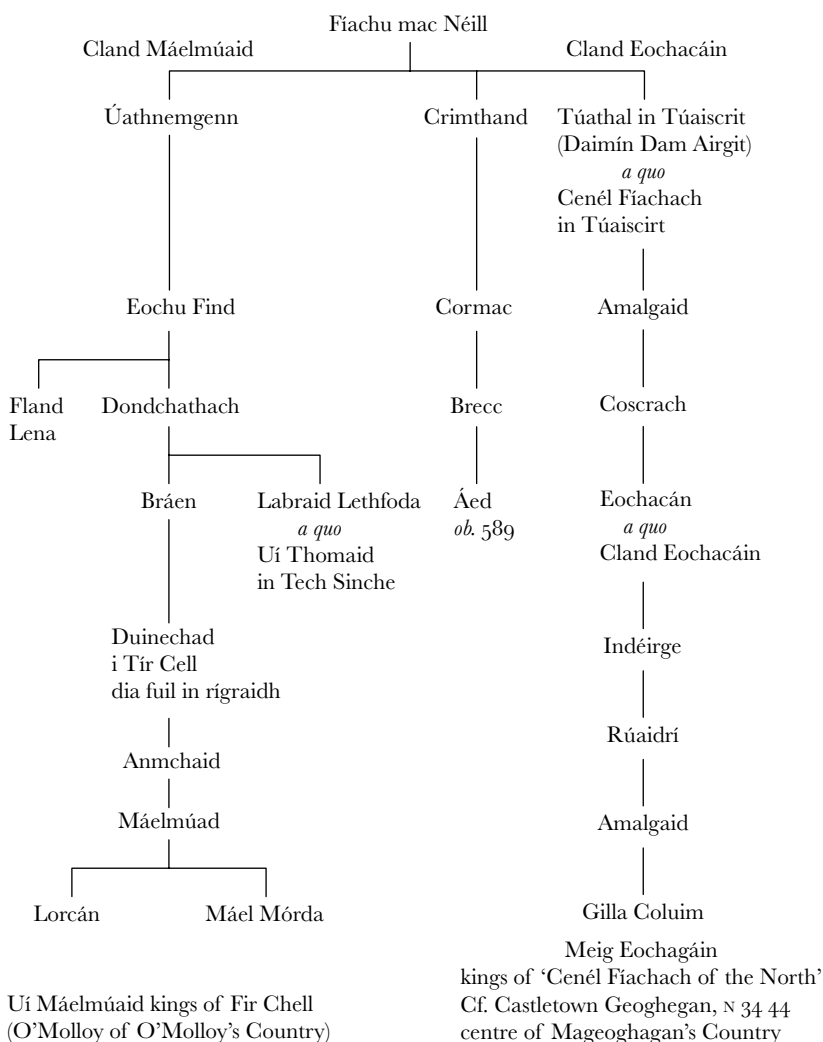
Genelach Cairpri Móir

Rawlinson 145 a 3

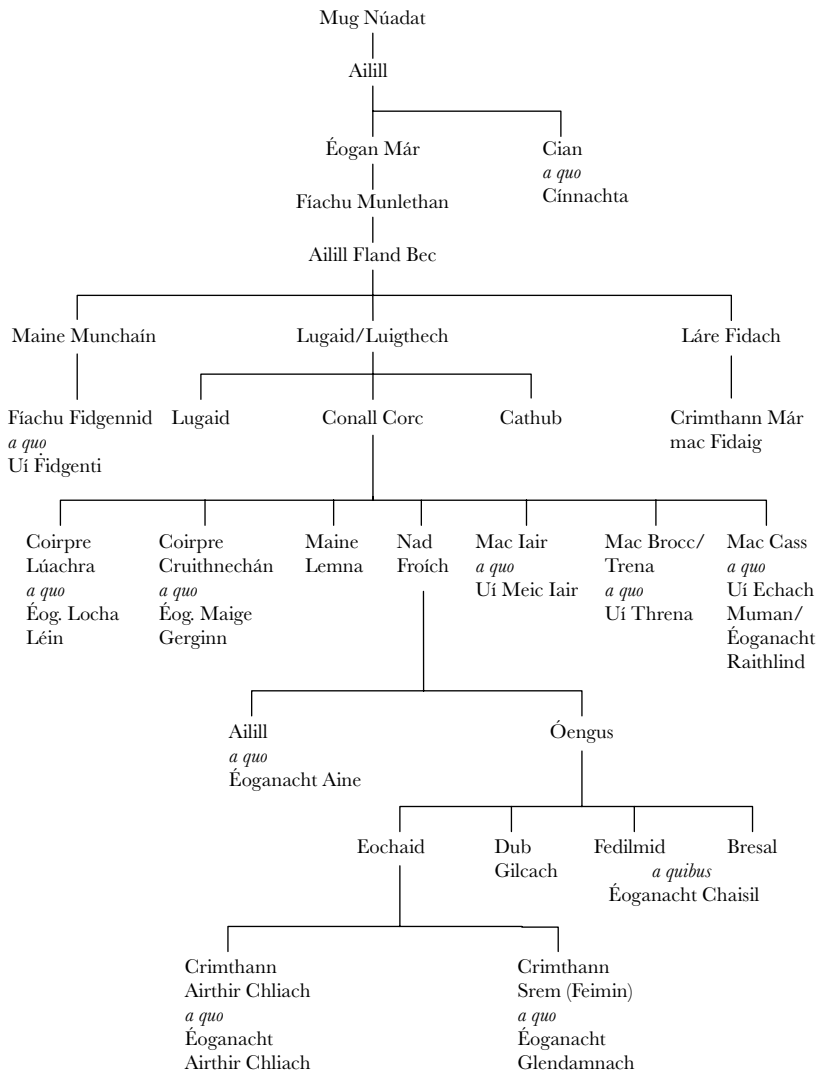
1. According to the Book of Ballymote (BB) Suibne mac Áeda was *sen Síl Dub Dúin*. Cf. AU 752.9: 'Mors Conaing nepotis Duibh Duin regis Coirpre Tethbae'. The guess as to his pedigree given above is on the basis of this note.
2. Conchobor m. Máele Dúin, *ob.* 706, king of Cenél Coirpri, could be the son of Máel Dúin m. Suibni or, less probably, of Máel Dúin m. Scandal.
3. Áed, k. of Cenél Coirpri, killed in Gránairet (Granard), AT 742 (fills gap in AU). His kingdom presumably included Coirpre Tethbae.
4. For Dub Innrecht mac Artgaile, *ob.* 799 in a battle in Tethbae (AU 799.2): see BB 83 aa 43.

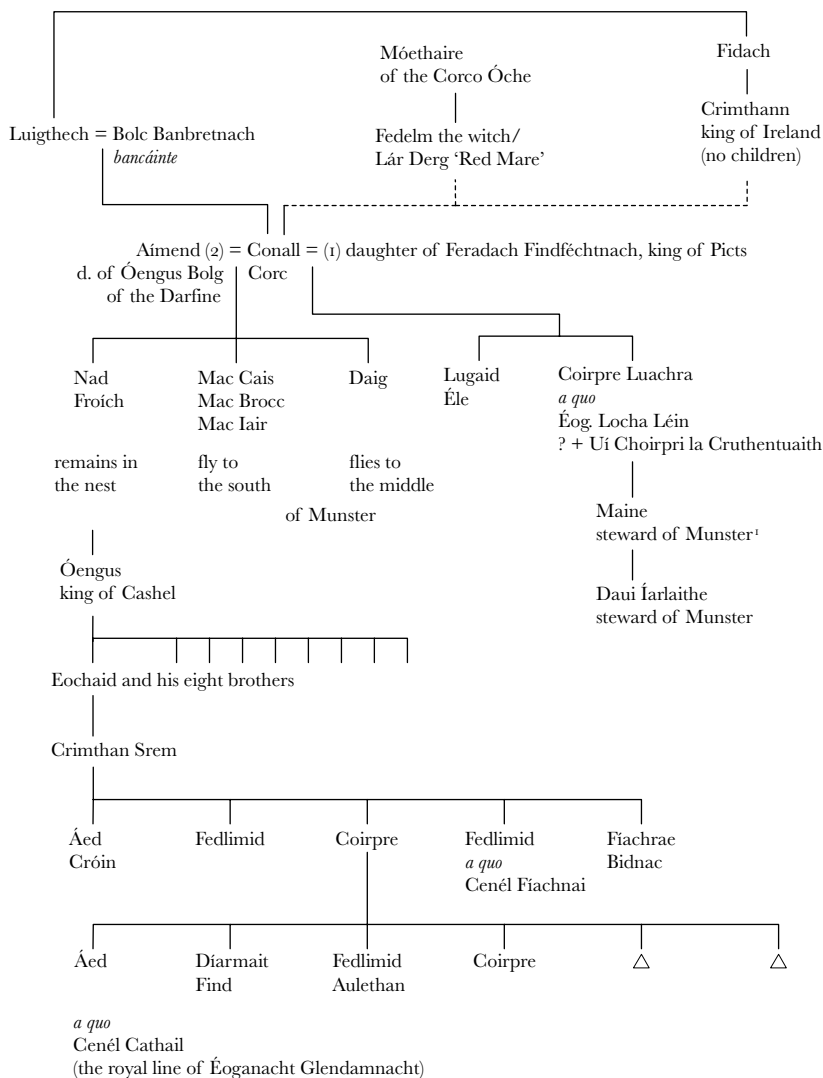
VII. Cenél Fiachach

There are several disagreements between the descending genealogy on BB 83 b and the ascending genealogies on 84 a. I have added, from *CGSH* § 9, the pedigree of Bishop Áed mac Bricc, the saint of Cell Áir and Ráith Aeda Bricc (Killare and Rahugh).



VIII. Early Éoganachta



IX. Conall Corc and the Corco Loígde ----- = fosterage¹ Except for West Munster

X. Munster king-lists

Dates in square brackets are only in AT; those in parentheses are only in AI. Those kings who are italicised with an unbracketed date were named king of Munster in the Chronicle of Ireland (compiled *c.* 911) as shown by the agreement of AU and one chronicle of the Clonmacnois group. Letters in square brackets denote branches of the Éoganachta.

Laud Synchronisms

(adding Conall Corc at the beginning)

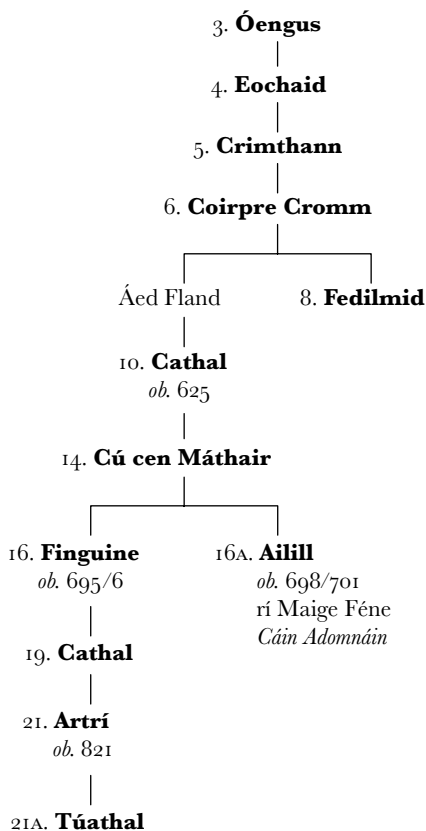
Other sources: annals, Fland Mainistrech, *LL* king-list (*CGH* i.360), ‘The Story of the Finding of Cashel’, ed. Dillon, § 2.

1. [Conall Corc]
2. Nad Fróech m. Cuirc
3. Óengus mac Nad Froich
4. Eochu (Eochaid) mac Óengusa [525]
5. Crimthann mac Echach [G]
6. Coirpre Crom m. Crimthainn [547, 579] [G]
7. Fergus [Scandal] m. Crimthainn [cf. 579] [AC]
8. Fedilmid m. Coirpri [G]
9. Fingen m. Áeda Duib [603–619] [C]
10. Cathal m. Áeda [619–625] [G]
11. *Fáilbe Fland m. Áeda Duib* [626–]637 [C]
12. Cuán m. Amolngada [639] [Á]
13. *Móenach m. Fingin* [C] 662
14. *Cú cen Máthair* [G] 665
15. *Colcu m. Fáilbi Flaind* [C] 678
16. Finguine m. Con cen Máthair [696] [G]
17. Eterscél m. Máele Umai (721) [Á]
18. *Cormac m. Ailella* [C] 713
19. Cathal m. Finguine [G] 742
20. Cathasach m. Etersceól [Á]

- 3a. Dauí Iarlaithe mac Maithni [L]
- 4a. Fedilmid mac Óengusa [cf. 525] [C]
- 4b. Dub Gilcach mac Óengusa
5. Omitted by ‘Finding’
- 6a. Cormac mac Ailella [549]
7. Omitted by ‘Finding’
(8a in place of 8: ‘Finding’)
- 8a. *Fedilmid mac Tigernaig* [R] 590
- 8b. Amolngid mac Éndai [603] [Á]
- 8c. Garbán mac Éndai [Á]
- 9a. Áed Bennán [619] [L]
- 12a. Cuán mac Éndai [649] [Á]
- 16a. *Ailill mac Con cen Máthair* [G], [696–]701
- 20a. Máel Dúin mac Áeda [L]
- 20b. Ólchobar mac Duib Indrecht [Á]
(deposed 793, *ob.* 805)
- 20c. Ólchobar mac Flainn, [Uí F.] 796
- 21a. Tuathal mac Artrach [G]

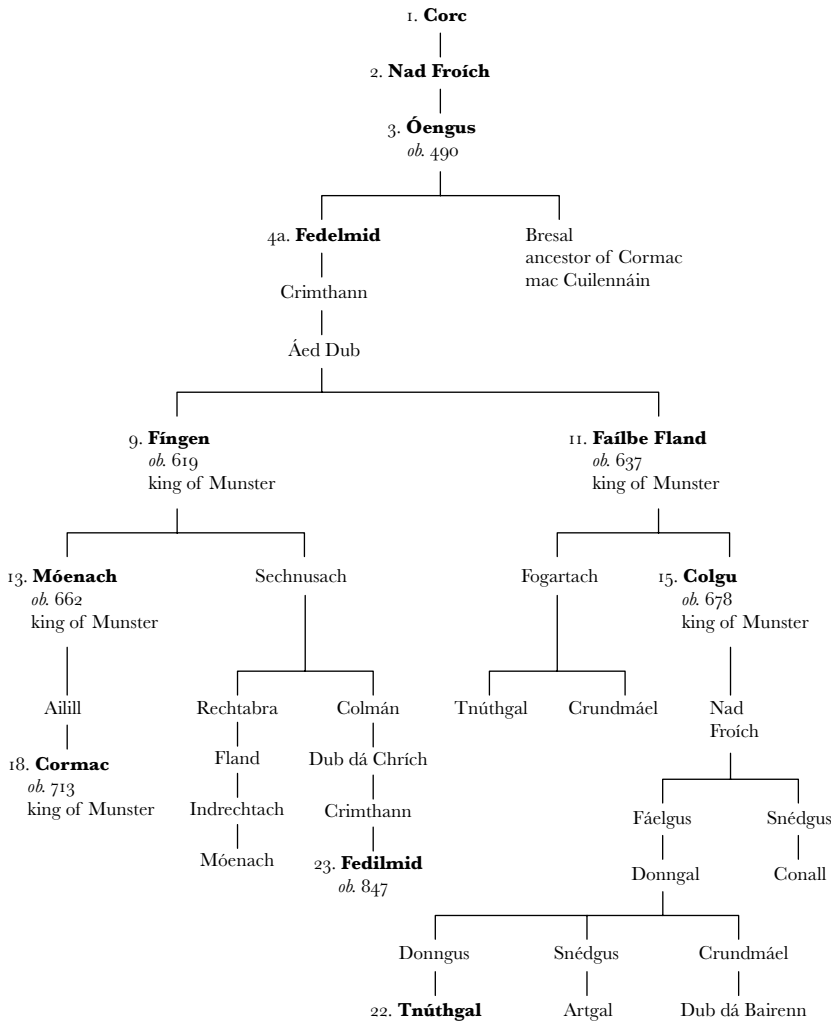
21. Artrí mac Cathail [G] 821
22. Tnúthgal mac Donngaile [C]
23. *Fedlimid mac Crimthainn* [C] 847

In ‘Finding’, the initial list ends with Cathal mac Finguine; eight names are then added, beginning with no. 21.

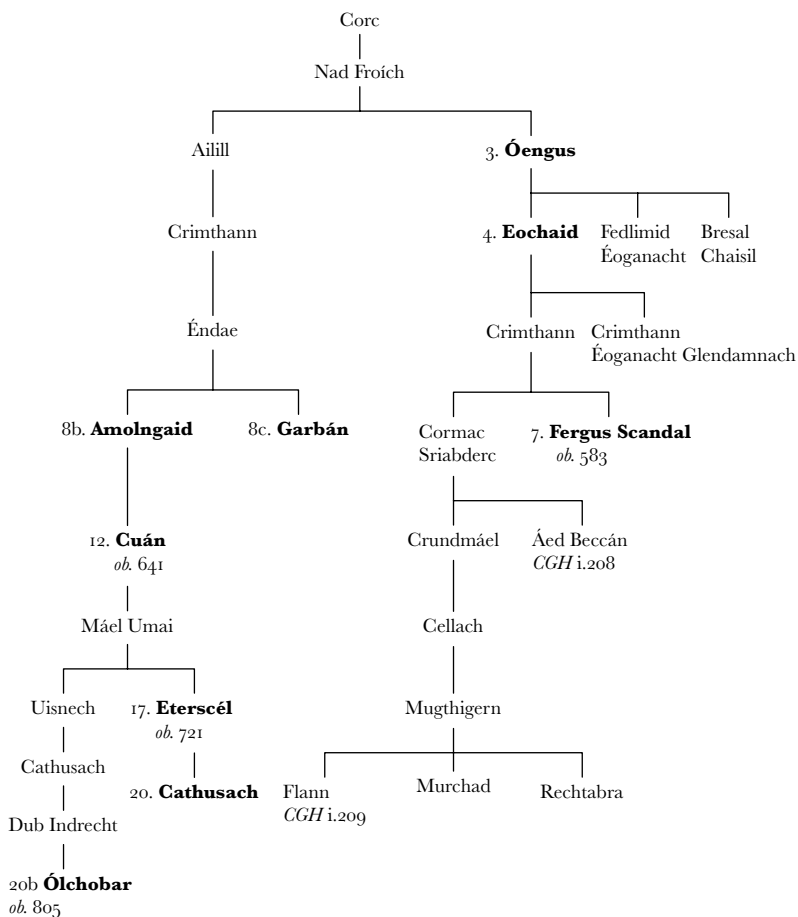
XI. Éoganacht Glendamnach

The poem by Luccreth moccu Chíara beginning ‘Cú cen Máthair maith cland’ (Meyer, *Über die älteste irische Dichtung*, i.53) is the genealogy of Cú cen Máthair of the Éoganacht Glendamnach.

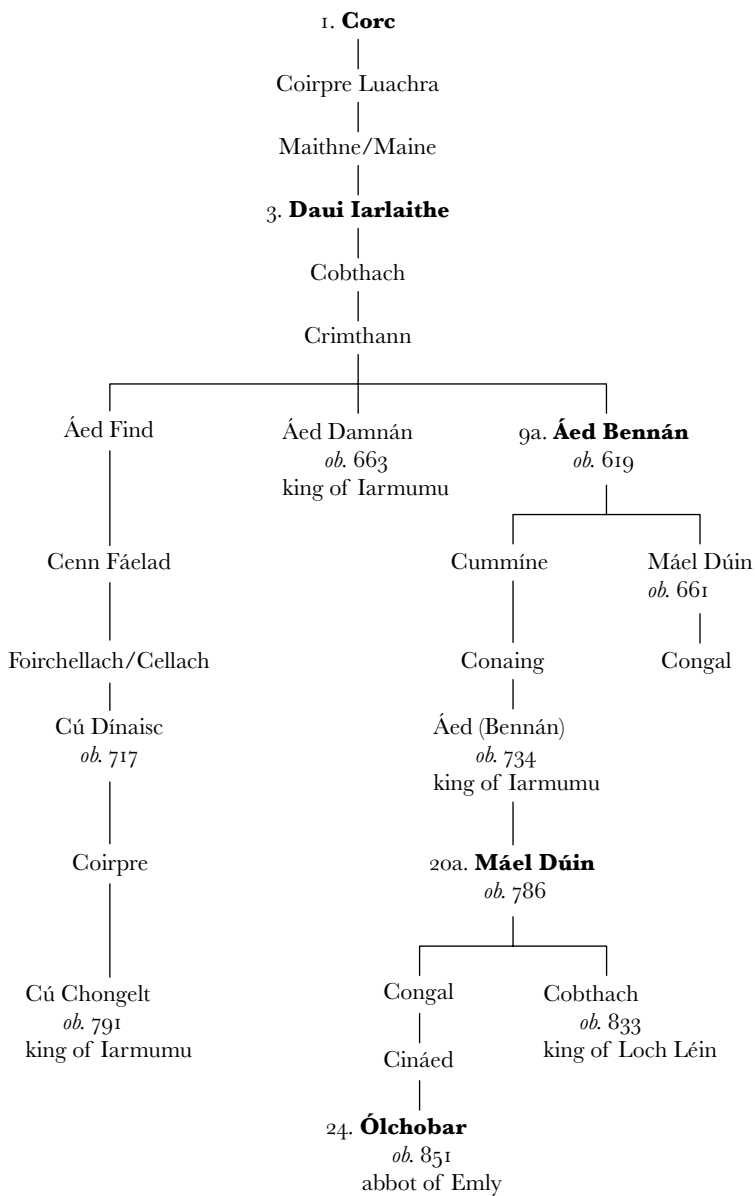
XII. Éoganacht Chaisil



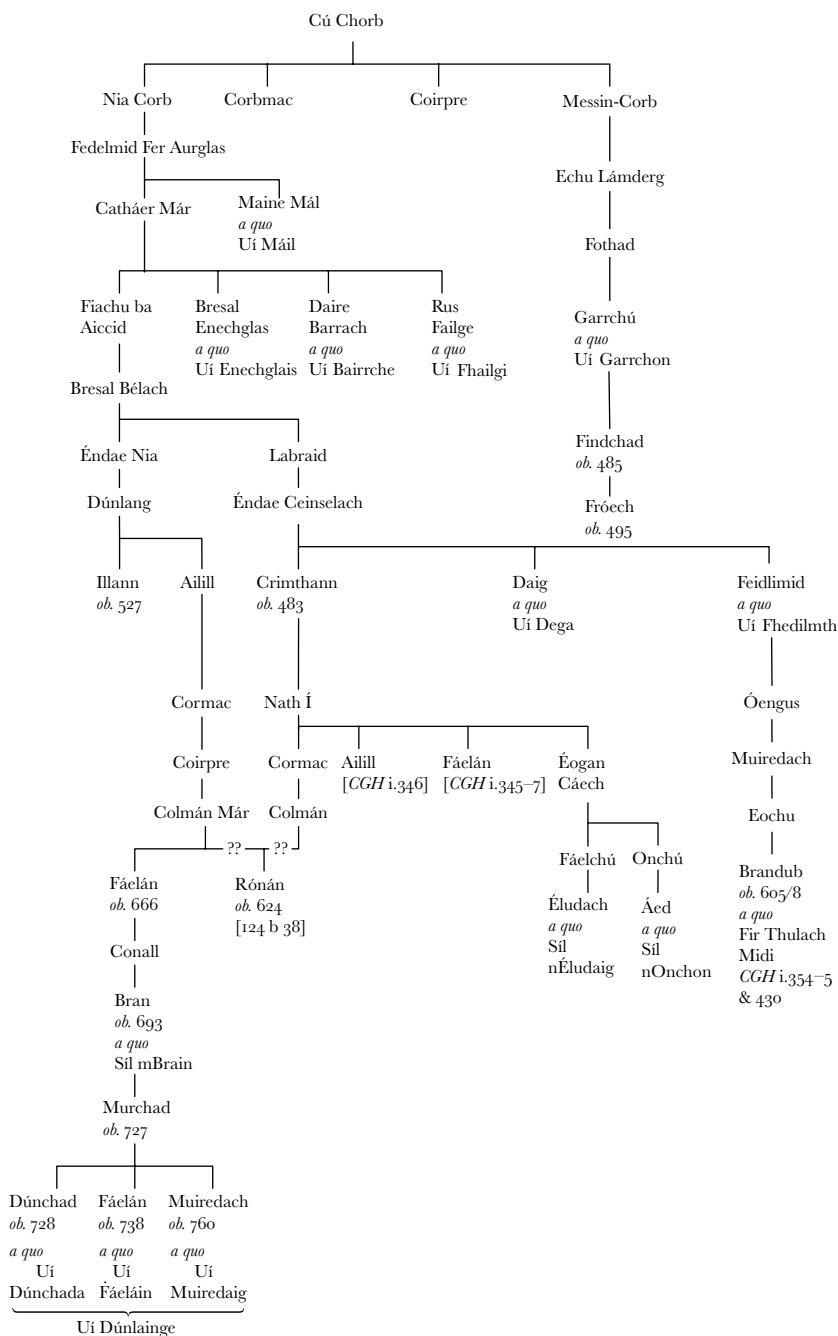
XIII. Éoganacht Áine and Éoganacht Airthir Chlíach



XIV. Éoganacht Locha Léin



XV. Early Leinster



XVI. Leinster king-lists compared

LL i.

- 1. Bresal Bélach
- 2. Éndae Cendselach
- 3. Crimthann mac Éndai
- 4. Fróech mac Findchada
- 5. Illand mac Dúnlainge
- 6. Ailill mac Dúnlainge
- 7. Cormac mac Ailella
- 8. Coirpre mac Cormaic
- 9. Colmán Míar mac Coirpri

- 10. Áed Cerr mac Colmáin
- 11. Brandub mac Echach
- 12. Rónán mac Colmáin
- 12a. Grundmáel m. Áeda (Bolggu Luatha)
- 13. Crimthann Cúallann mac Áeda Círr
- 13a. Grundmáel Erbolc mac Rónáin
- 14. Fáelán mac Colmáin
- 15. Fiannamail mac Máele Tuile
- 16. Bran mac Conaill
- 17. Cellach mac Gerthidi
- 18. Murchad mac Brain
- 19. Dúin Chad mac Murchada
- 20. Fáelán mac Murchada

De Regibus Lagenorum (CGH i.8–9) cf. CGH i.335

- Bresal Bélach
- Muireadach Mo Snithech
- Móenech
- Mac Cairthinn
- Nad Buidb

Obit

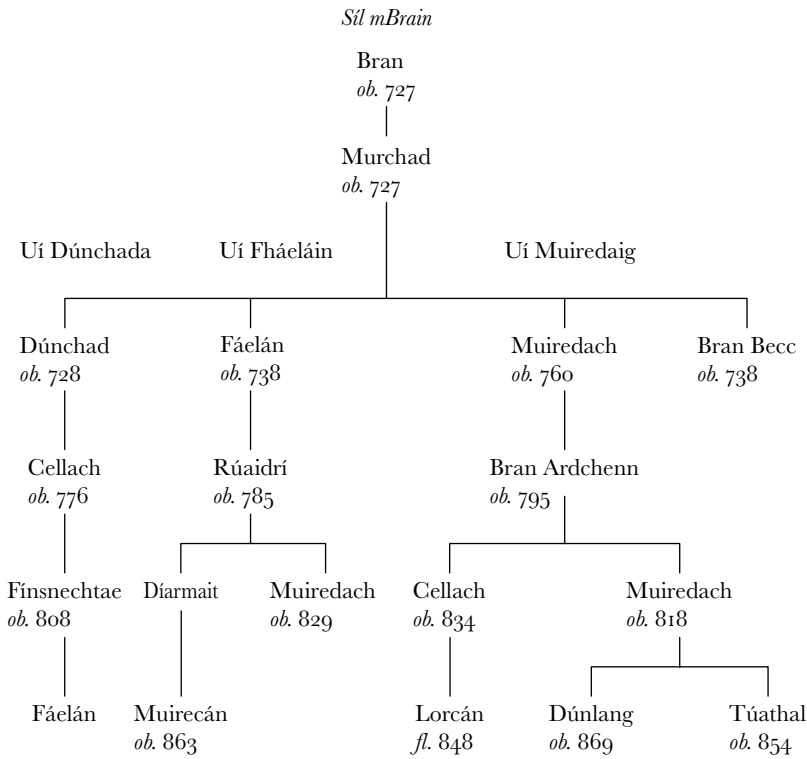
- ob. 595
- ob. 605, AU
- ob. 624
- ob. 628
- ob. 633, *rex Lagenorum*
- ob. 656, *rex Lagenensium*
- ob. 666
- ob. 680
- ob. 690/93
- ob. 715
- ob. 727
- ob. 728
- ob. 738

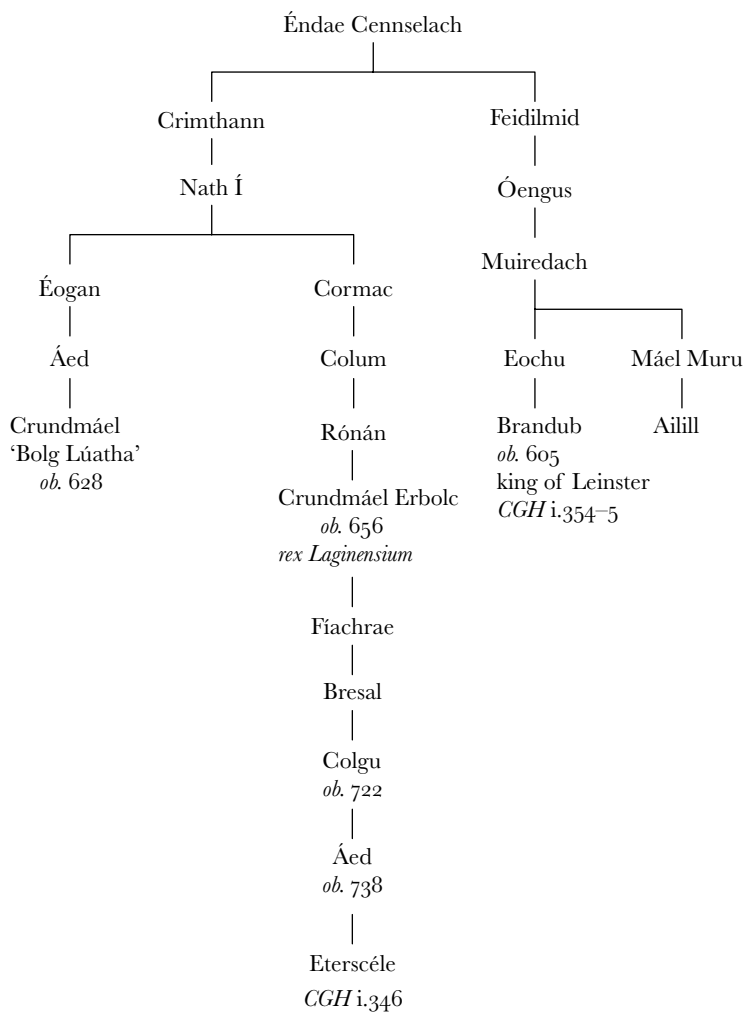
Dynasty

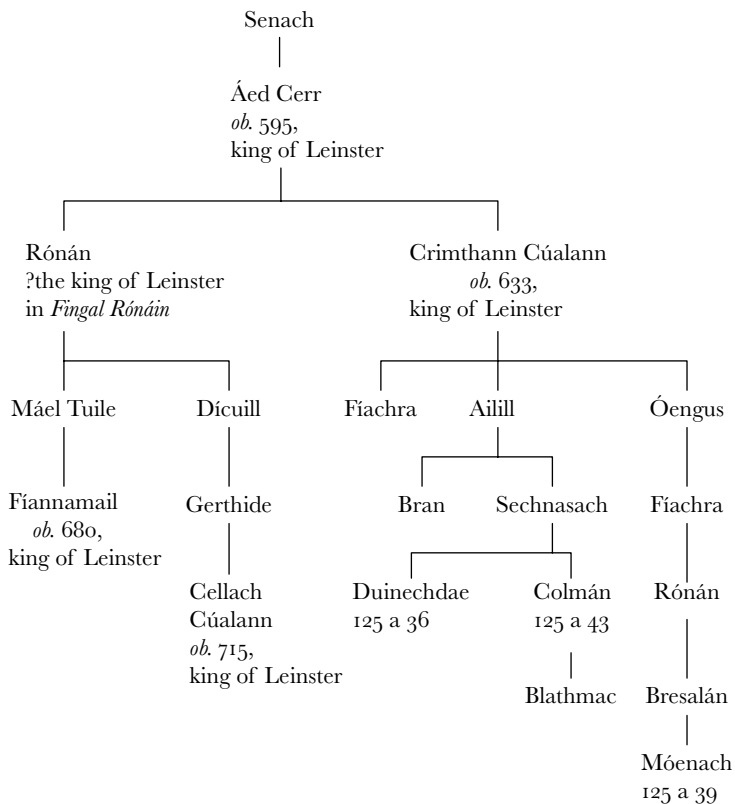
- Uí Máil
- Uí Fedlimthea
- Uí Chenselaig
- Uí Máil, CGH i.76 (125 a 8);
- Uí Chenselaig CGH i.346
- Uí Dúnlainge
- Uí Máil
- Uí Dúnlainge
- Uí Máil
- Uí Dúnlainge
- Uí Dúnlainge
- Uí Dúnlainge

20a. Áed mac Colgen	<i>ob.</i> 738, CI	Uí Chenselaig
21. Bran Becc mac Murchada	<i>ob.</i> 738, CI not king of Leinster	Uí Dúnlainge
22. Muiredach mac Murchada	<i>ob.</i> 760	Uí Dúnlainge
23. Cellach mac Dúnchada	<i>ob.</i> 776	Uí Dúnchada
24. Rúaidrí mac Fáelain	<i>ob.</i> 785	Uí Fáeláin
25. Bran Ardchend mac Muiredaig	<i>ob.</i> 795	Uí Muiredaig
26. Fínsnechtae mac cellaig	<i>ob.</i> 808	Uí Dúnchada
27. Muiredach mac Rúadrach	<i>ob.</i> 829	Uí Fáeláin
28. Cellach mac Brain	<i>ob.</i> 834	Uí Muiredaig
29. Bran mac Fáeláin	<i>ob.</i> 838	Uí Dúnchada
30. Rúarc mac Brain	<i>ob.</i> 862	Uí Dúnchada
31. Lorcán mac Cellaig	<i>flor.</i> 848	Uí Muiredaig
32. Tríathal mac Máele Brigte	<i>ob.</i> 854	Uí Muiredaig
<i>De Regibus Lagenorum</i>		
Bresal Bélach		son of Fiachu ba Aiccid (<i>CGH</i> i.71); the common ancestor of the Uí Dúnlainge and Uí Chenselaig
Muiredach Mo Snithech		Uí Bairrche
Mónech		Uí Bairrche
Mac Cáirthin		Uí Enechglais
Nad Buidb		Uí Dega (distinguish the Uí Dúnlainge Nad Buidb, <i>CGH</i> i.73, from the Nad Buidb mac Eirc Búadaig, <i>CGH</i> i.334, 335)

XVII. Uí Dúnlainge



XVIII. Uí Chennselaig

XIX. Uí Máil*CGH* i.76–8

Rónán mac Áeda is said (*CGH* i.76, 125 a 11) to have been a bishop and to have been killed by his brother Crimthann.

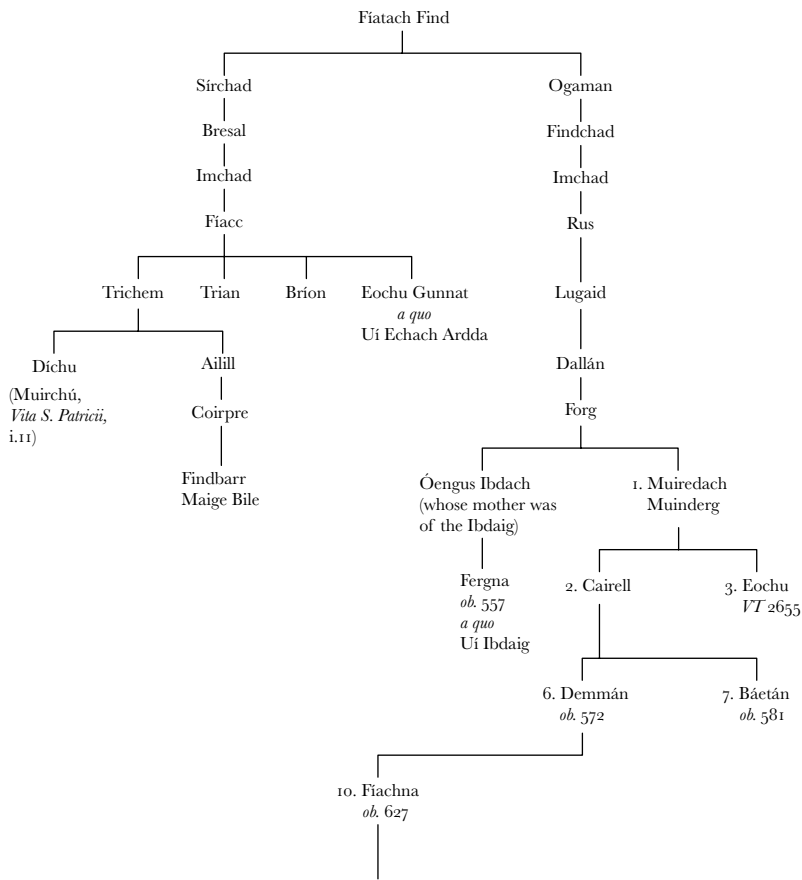
Fiannamail m. Máele Tuile is said to have been killed by his servant Fochsechán at the behest of Fínsnechtae, king of Tara.

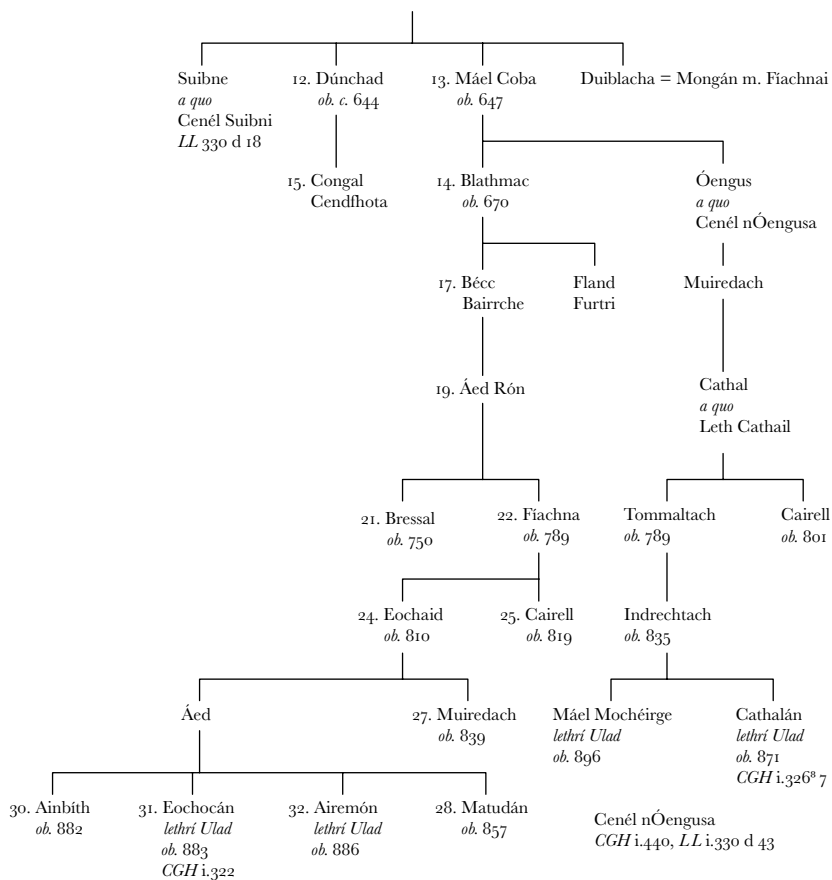
XX. Ulaid king-list

LL i.192–3 (C = Cruithni; DF = Dál Fíatach)

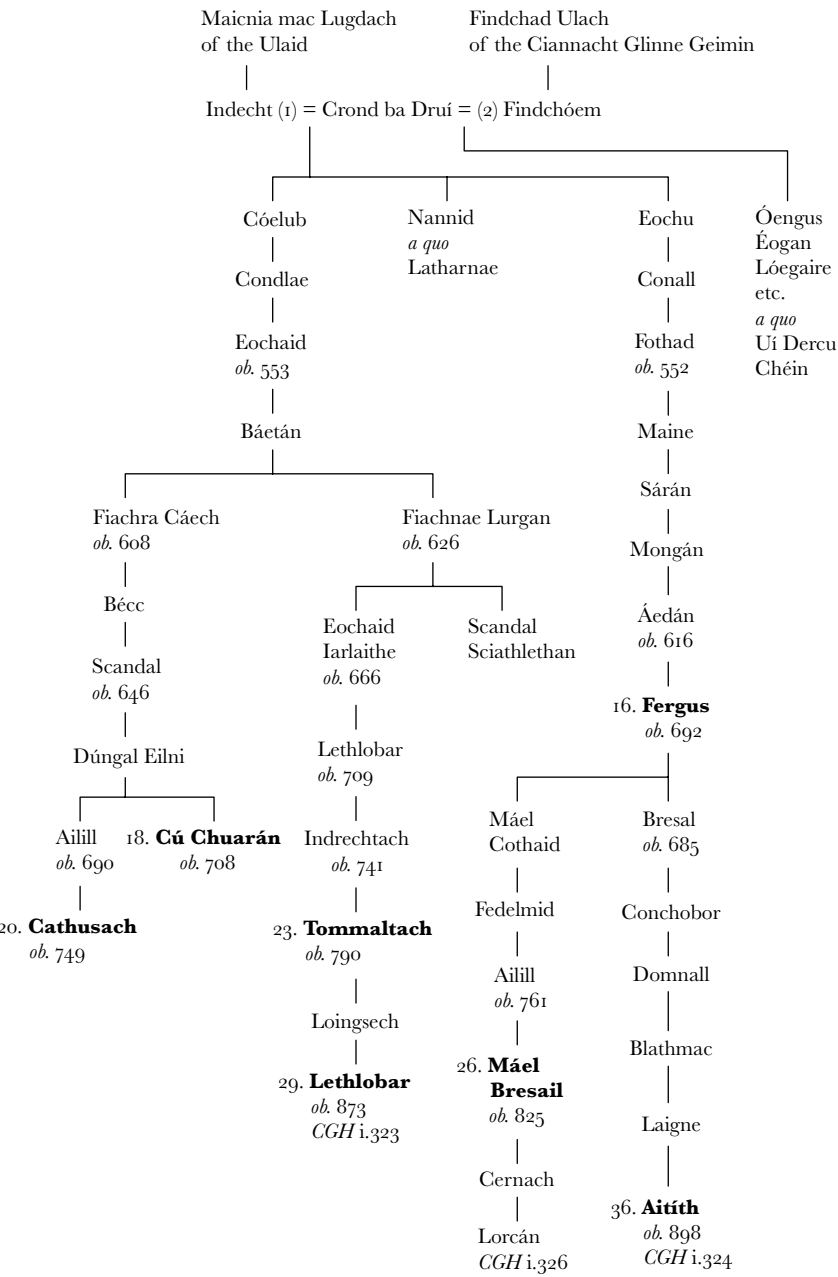
	<i>Obit</i>	<i>Dynasty</i>
1. Muiredach Muinderg		DF
2. Cairell mac Muiredaig		DF
3. Eochu mac Muiredaig		DF
4. Eochaid mac Conlai, <i>a quo</i> Uí Echach Coba		C
5. Fergna mac Óengusa	557	DF
6. Demmán mac Cairill	572	DF
7. Báetán mac Cairill	581	DF
8. Daig mac Cairill		DF
9. Áed Dub mac Suibni	588	C
10. Fíachna mac Báetáin	626	C
11. Fíachna mac Demmáin	627	DF
12. Congal Cáech mac Scandláin	637	C
13. Dúnchad mac Fíachnai	<i>c.</i> 644	DF
14. Máel Coba mac Fíachnai	647	DF
15. Blathmac mac Máele Coba	670	DF
16. Congal Cendfhota	674	DF
17. Óengus (Fergus?) mac Áedán	692?	C
18. Bécc Bairche mac Blathmaic	abd. 707, <i>ob.</i> 718	DF
19. Cú Chúarán mac Dúngaile	708	C
20. Áed Rón	735	DF
21. Bressal mac Áeda	750	DF

XXI. Genealogy of Dál Fiatach



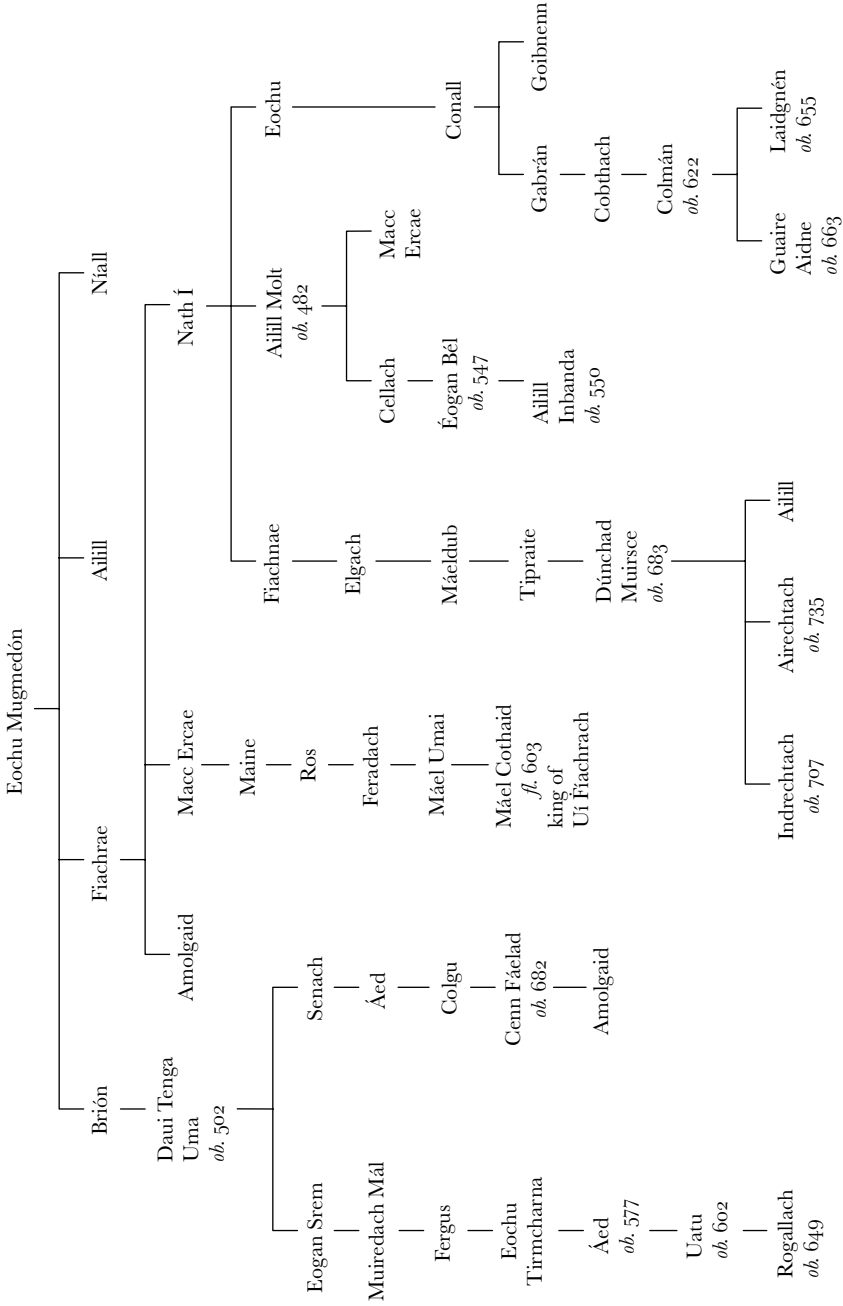


XXII. Cruithni (Dál nAraidi)



XXIII. Early Connachta

Uí Briúin: Book of Lecan, 63 a 1–69 a 36; BB 93 a 1–95 a 18.



XXIV. King-list

LL, p. 191; *Laud Misc.* 610 (K. Meyer, *ŹCP*, 9 (1913), 482–3; BB 57–8 (facs.); poem in BB 58–9 attributed to Gilla na Náem Ua Duinn; M. F. Liddell, ‘A Poem on the Kings of Connaught’, *ŹCP*, 9 (1913), 461–9, from Rawl. B 502 (facs. p. 165a); P. Walsh, ‘Christian Kings of Connacht’, *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society*, 18 (1939), 124–43.

- | | |
|--|----------------|
| 1. Amalgaid mac Fiachrach | F |
| 2. Ailill Molt, <i>ob.</i> 482 (CI) | F |
| 3. Dauí Tengad Umac, ¹ <i>ob.</i> 502 (CI) | B |
| 4. Éogan Bél mac Duach (Cellach in Byrne), ² <i>ob.</i> 547 (CI) | F |
| 5. Ailill Inbanda mac Eógain, <i>ob.</i> 550 (AClon) | F |
| 6. Eochu Tirmcharna (CI) | B (Aí) |
| 7. Feradach mac Rosa | F (Fir Cherai) |
| [VIII. Máel Fothaid/Máel Cothaid] | |
| 8. Áed mac Echach Tirmcharna, ³ <i>ob.</i> 577 | B (Aí) |
| 9. Uatu mac Áeda mac Echach Tirmcharna, <i>ob.</i> 602 (CI) | B (Aí) |
| 10. Máel Fothaid mac Máele Umac, ⁴ <i>fl.</i> 603 | F (Fir Cherai) |
| Máel Cothaid, king of Uí Fhiachrach (Muirscé) (CI) | |
| 11. Colmán mac Colbthaig, ⁵ <i>ob.</i> 622 (CI) | F (Aidne) |
| 12. <i>Rogellach mac Uatach</i> , <i>ob.</i> 649 king of the <i>Connachta</i> , CI | B (Aí) |
| 13. Loingsech mac Colmáin (Laidgnén), <i>ob.</i> 655, king of the <i>Connachta</i> (AT, CS) | F (Aidne) |
| 14. Guaire Aidni mac Colmáin, <i>ob.</i> 663 (CI) | F (Aidne) |
| 15. <i>Cend Fáelad mac Colgan</i> , <i>ob.</i> 682, king of the <i>Connachta</i> (CI) | B (Seóla) |
| ? + Muiredach Nár mac Guairi, <i>ob.</i> 668, king of the <i>Connachta</i> (CS; no such person in AU or AT) | |
| 16. Dúnchad Muirscé ⁶ mac Máelduib (thus AU), <i>ob.</i> 683, king of the <i>Connachta</i> (AT, CS, the latter as a gloss) | F (Muaid) |
| 17. Fergal Aidne mac Artgaile, ⁷ <i>ob.</i> 696 (CI); AT adds, at the end of its annal for 696: ‘Muiredhach Muillethan ri Conacht an-’, i.e. this entry was taken for a king-list which gave reign-lengths. | F (Aidne) |
| 18. <i>Cellach mac Rogellaig</i> , <i>ob.</i> 705, king of the <i>Connachta</i> (<i>died post clericatum</i>) (CI) | B (Aí) |
| 19. Inrechtach mac Dúnchada Muirscé, ⁸ <i>ob.</i> 707 (CI) king of the Three <i>Connachta</i> (AT, CS) | F (Muaid) |
| 20. Muiredach Aí mac Muirgíusa/Fergusa, <i>ob.</i> 702 (CI); king of the <i>Connachta</i> (AT, CS; the latter adds: ‘a quo Sil Muiredhaig nati sunt’) | B (Aí) |

¹ Liddell, ‘Poem’, st. 3, has Dui Galach here instead of Dui Tenga, whom it places after Ailill Inbanda. ² Eogan Bel d’eis a athar (Dui Galach), *ibid.*, st. 4.

³ *Ibid.*, st. 6, has Maelcothaid mac Maelhumai (cf. no. 10) inserted here before Áed mac Echach.

⁴ Maelcothaid mac Maelhumai, *ibid.*, st. 6. ⁵ Colmán mac Conchobuir, *ibid.*, st. 8.

⁶ Dunchad Muirscé, *ibid.*, st. 10; NB absence of syncope (guaranteed by syllable-count).

⁷ *Ibid.*, st. 11 (Liddell inverts 17 and 18).

⁸ Here Liddell, *ibid.*, sts. 12–14, has (a) Muiredach mac Murgossa, (b) Indrechtach, (c) Cathal mac Muiredaig, (d) Domnall mac Cathail, (e) Indrechtach mac Muiredaig. Cathal’s right to the throne is denied.

21. *Cathal mac Muiredaig*,⁹ *ob.* 735 (CI); *king of the Connachta* (CI) B (Aí)
23. *Domnall mac Cathail*, *ob.* 715, CS B (Aí)
24. *Inrechtach mac Muiredaig*, *ob.* 723 (CI); *king of the Connachta* (CI) B (Aí)
25. *Áed Balb* (*mac Inrechtaig*), *ob.* 742 (CI); *king of the Connachta* (CI) B (Aí)
(but order not the same in AU and AT)
26. *Fergus mac Cellaig*, *ob.* 756 (CI); *king of the Connachta* (CI) B (Aí)
27. *Ailill mac Inrechtaig*, *ob.* 764 (CI); *king of the Connachta* (CI) F (Muaid)
[neither AT nor CS available for this period]
28. *Dub Inrecht mac Cathail*, *ob.* 768 B (Aí)
29. *Dond Cothaid* (*mac Cathail*), *ob.* 773 F (Muaid)
30. *Flathrí*¹⁰ *mac Domnaill*, *abd.* 777, *ob.* 779 B (Aí)
31. *Ardgal mac Cathail*, *abd.* 782, *ob.* 791 B (Aí)
32. *Tipraite mac Taidc*, *ob.* 786 B (Aí)
[CS begins again]
33. *Muirgius mac Tommaltaig*, *ob.* 815 (CI); *king of the Connachta* (CI) B (Aí)
34. *Diarmait mac Taidc* [*recte Tommaltaig*], *ob.* 833; *king of the Connachta* (CI) B (Aí)
35. *Cathal mac Muirgiusa*, *ob.* 837 B (Aí)

Names in italics are of persons entitled 'king of the Connachta' in the Chronicle of Ireland (CI).

⁹ *Cathal mac Murgiusa*, *ibid.*, st. 15.

¹⁰ *Flathrói*, Liddell, st. 19.

Glossary: Irish and Latin

achad, field (cf. Augh- names in Scotland, Agh-, Agha- in Ireland)

-acht, *see gens*

airchennach, head of a church, ‘erenagh’; in Latin *princeps*

ard, high, high part, end part (common in place-names)

aue, g.sg. *auí*, n.pl. *auí*, later *úa*, pl. *uí*, grandson, descendant, especially common in names of dynasties, as in Uí Néill, ‘The Descendants of Níall’

baislec < Lat. *basilica*

ben (*ban-*), woman

both, hut, bothy

cáin, edict, tribute

campus, Lat. equivalent to *mag* (q.v.)

caisel, stone fort, < Lat. *castellum*

cathair, g.sg. *cathaire*, later *cathrach*, seat of bishop or king, < Lat. *cathedra*

cèle, companion, client

cell, church, < Lat. *cella*

cenél, kindred (= Lat. *genus* in Adomnán), as in Cenél Conaill, ‘The Kindred of Conall’

cland, children, offspring (like Welsh *plant* ‘children’, *cland* < Lat. *planta*)

corcu, equivalent to Adomnán’s *gens* (*see gens*), as in Corcu Duibne, Corcu Loígde

crích, territory, district

dair, *daur*, oak

daire, oakwood

dairmag, oak plain (Durrow < Dairmag)

dál (1) share, part, also an equivalent of Adomnán’s *gens*, as in Dál Ríata

dál (2) meeting

domnach, church, < Lat. *dominicum* (= Grk. *kuriakon* > church)

domnach mór (*már*), major church

dún, fort

eclais, church (*via* British **eglēs*, which also > Eccles)

feis, spending the night, feast (as in *Feis Temro*, ‘The Feast of Tara’)

fid, wood

fine, kindred, kinsman, kinswoman

flaith, lord, ruler, lordship, kingdom

gens, usually ‘people’ but used by Adomnán for a group also denoted by the Irish terms *corcu*, *dál*, *-rige* (*-raige*) and the suffix *-acht* in Connacht, Ciannacht etc.

glenn, g.sg. *glinne*, n.pl. *glinne*, valley (> Engl. glen)

less, *liss*, domestic enclosure, enclosed set of buildings, ringfort

loch, lake

mac, g.sg. and n. pl. *maic*, son

mag, g.sg. *maige*, plain, open and cultivated land

moccu, *maccu*, belonging to *gens*, e.g. *moccu Araidi*, belonging to Dál nAraidi

nepotes (Néill, Ailello etc.) descendants of (Níall, Ailill etc.) = Ir. Aui/Uí Néill etc.

óenach, fair, major assembly, as in the Fair of Tailtiu (Teltown), *óenach Tailten*

plebs = Ir. *tíath* (q.v.)

populus, sometimes = Ir. *tíath* (q.v.)

princeps = Ir. *airchennach* (q.v.)

ráith, fort

regio (Lat.), district, but often used for kingdoms

relic, grave, < Lat. *reliquiae*

ri, king (= Lat. *rex*)

-rige, *-raige*, kingdom (common in names of *gentes*)

síl, offspring, descendants (collectively), as in *Síl nÁeda Sláne*, the Uí Néill of Brega

slíab, mountain (> slieve in Anglicised place-names)

tech, house

tír, land

toísech, leader (= Lat. *dux*), > Mod. Ir. *taoiseach*

tíath, g.sg. *tíaithe*, n.pl. *tíatha*, people, small kingdom, laity

úa, g.sg. and n. pl. *uí*, later forms of *aue* etc. (q.v.)

Common personal names

Áed, Anglicised as Hugh, hence *Tír nÁeda* > Tirhugh (the area around Donegal Town)

Áedán, Aidán, Aidan

Ailill, as in *nepotes Ailello*, Uí Ailella, a dynasty in Connaught

Cíarán, as in the saint of Glendalough

Cóelub, g.sg. *Cóelbad*, as in Uí Chóelbad, the ruling dynasty of Mag Line

Coirpre, Cairpre, as in Cenél Coirpri, a branch of the Uí Néill

Colmán, as in Cland Cholmáin, the ruling dynasty of Mide (Meath)

Conall, as in Cenél Conaill or the Elizabethan Tyrconnell, 'land of Conall' (the later Co. Donegal)

Congal, as in Congal Cáech 'Congal the one-eyed', a seventh-century king of Tara

Cormac, as in Columba's friend who made a habit of sailing west into the Atlantic

Dúnlang, as in Uí Dúnlainge, the major royal dynasty of northern Leinster

Éogan, as in Cenél nÉogain and the later form Tír Eóghain > Tyrone, 'land of Éóghan'

Lóegaire, as in the king of Tara supposed to have opposed Patrick

Níall, as in the ancestor of the Uí Néill

Óengus, later Aonghus, Scottish Angus, as in Óengus the Culdee (*Céle Dé*), or Óengus the most powerful king of the Picts in the eighth century

Túathal, as in Úa Túathail > O'Toole

Types of name used for kingdoms and dynasties

1. Ulaid: peoples rather than dynasties.
2. Dál Fiatach, Dál nAraidí, Dál Ríatai, Corcu Theimne, Corcu Duibne, Cíarraige, Cíannachta, Connachta, Éoganachta: *gentes*.
3. Nepotes Néill = Aui Néill > Uí Néill, Uí Dúnlainge, Uí Dúinchada, Uí Fáeláin, Uí Muiredaig, Uí Chenselaig; Cenél Conaill, Cenél nÉogain: dynasties.

For example, the dynasty of Mag Line was the Uí Chóelbad (3), who belonged to Dál nAraidí (2), who belonged to the Cruithni (1).

The names of the principal kingdoms, peoples and dynasties

Airgialla, the vassal peoples and kingdoms of much of Cos. Londonderry, Tyrone, Fermanagh, Monaghan and Armagh

Cenél Coirpri, a branch of the Uí Néill with territories in Cos. Sligo, Longford and Kildare

Cenél Conaill, a branch of the Uí Néill ruling most of Co. Donegal

Cenél nÉogain (also Cenél nÉógain), a branch of the Uí Néill, from Inishowen but extending southwards

Cenél nGabráin, the ruling dynasty of the southern part of Dál Ríata, esp. Kintyre

Cenél Loairn, the ruling dynasty of the northern part of Dál Ríata (around Oban; hence Lorne)

Cenél Maini, a branch of the Uí Néill (or thought to be so), rulers of southern Tethbae around Ardagh, Co. Longford

Ciannachta (pl.) the *Ciannacht-gentes*

Ciannacht Breg, the *Ciannacht* of Brega (around Duleek, Monasterboice, Lusk)

Ciannacht Glinne Geimin, the *Ciannacht* of Glenn Geimin (around Dungiven, Co. Londonderry)

Cíarraige

Cíarraige Lúachra, north Co. Kerry

Cíarraige nAí, in Co. Roscommon

Cland Cholmáin, the branch of the southern Uí Néill that ruled Mide

Corcu Loigde, the ruling *gens* of much of west Co. Cork

Dál nAraidí, the ruling *gens* of parts of Co. Antrim

Dál Cuinn, a term embracing the Connachta, the Uí Néill and the Airgíalla

Dál Fiatach, the ruling *gens* of the Ulaid

Dál Messin Corb, a Leinster *gens*, powerful in the fifth and sixth centuries

Dál Riata, a ruling *gens* in north Co. Antrim, Argyll and the Isles

Déisi Muman, ‘the vassal peoples of Munster’, in Co. Waterford, but other *Déisi* were in Co. Clare, Co. Limerick and Co. Meath (> Decies)

Éli, north Co. Tipperary around Thurles and Roscrea

Éoganachta (also *Éóganachta*), the ruling *gentes* of Munster

Éoganacht Áine, around Emly in east Co. Limerick

Éoganacht Airthir Chliach (‘the É. of the east part of Cliu’), east of É. Áine

Éoganacht Chaisil, around Cashel, south Co. Tipperary

Éoganacht Glendamnach, around Glanworth, north Co. Cork

Éoganacht Locha Léin (also Uí Choirpri Lúachra), around Killarney

Éoganacht Raithlind (also Uí Echach Muman), around Kinsale, Co. Cork

Fothairt (later also *Fotharta*), the people to which Brigit belonged, scattered geographically but mainly in Leinster

Múscraige, a collection of scattered kingdoms in Munster (> Muskerry)

O سراige, approx. Co. Kilkenny, more accurately the diocese of Ossory

Síl nAeda Sláne, the branch of the Uí Néill descended from Áed Sláne (*ob.* 604), rulers of Brega

Tethbae, approx. Co. Longford

Uí Ailella, one of ‘The Three Connachta’, the leading dynasties of Connaught

Uí Amolngada (also Uí Amolngid, Uí Amalgada), a dynasty in Co. Mayo

Uí Bairrche, in Co. Carlow and Co. Wexford

Uí Briúin, one of ‘The Three Connachta’, the leading dynasties of Connaught

Uí Chennselaig (also Uí Chenselaig), the leading dynasty of southern Leinster

Uí Chellaig Cúalann, the dynasty descended from Cellach Cúalann (*ob.* 715)

Uí Dúnláinge, the leading ruling dynasty of Leinster from the eighth century

Uí Enechglaiss, a Leinster dynasty, powerful in the fifth century

Uí Fiachrach, one of ‘The Three Connachta’, the leading dynasties of Connaught

Uí Máil, one of the leading ruling dynasties of Leinster in the seventh century

Uí Néill, the leading royal dynasty (with several branches) in the northern half of Ireland

Ulaid, the ruling people of the province of Ulster, normally applied to Dál Fiatach (east Co. Down) but claimed by Dál nAraidi (much of Co. Antrim)

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